

# **BETWEEN YOU AND ME**

**V.C.V. CHENULU**



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## ***FOREWORD***

This is a translation of the articles I wrote in Telugu, my first venture in that language after nearly forty years of its disuse except at home. The Telugu versions of those with asterisk against them in the index were published in the literary supplement of the daily Sunday Andhra Prabha, serially between January to March 1991. The topics discussed are relevant to a large extent to situations all over India, though a few may be special to Andhra Pradesh only.

Any translation has a disadvantage that the idiom and the felicity of expression of the original cannot be fully realised in it despite the translator's proficiency in both the languages. My knowledge of Telugu itself is minimal and I cannot claim even an equal level of proficiency in English at all. Because of a vast cultural difference I doubt if certain terms of Telugu can be translated at all to readers who are not conversant with the Andhra or Indian customs and mores.

In these articles I was guided by two truths I learnt in my professional experience as a practicing engineer. If one wants to get his message across, it must be in a language his target readers understand. I wrote these in Telugu in a language of daily usage, easily

understood by ordinary folk with an elementary school education. In the English translation also I hope that this objective is not lost. A second truth I learnt is that what I wish to state should be brief and not such as to tax the patience of the reader. Almost all the topics are, therefore, only of a couple pages each. Most of the issues touched are ageless and can be discussed in volumes. My attempt was to treat each issue in a light hearted way to arouse an interest in it without any pretense to serious scholarship or research on the same..

I consider my efforts are worth it if the reader considers these short essays amusing and enjoyable and in all that simplicity there is an idea, a phrase or a sentence, here and there, worth remembering.

V.C.V.Chenulu

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## ***MY BETTER HALF***

"Listen, listen, I am calling you only; tell me who went to the bath room? I say, listen. Why don't you answer me despite my crying myself hoarse? Are you or are you not putting that newspaper aside and replying to my question?"

No sooner had I said, " mmm...What is it that you are asking?", than she came and wrenched the newspaper away from my hand and gave me her scorching looks. It was clear that a big issue had cropped up unbeknown to me, and sitting in that chair I could only helplessly stare back wondering what was to come next.

"Why are you giving me that empty foolish look?" asked my better half. Even before I completed my mumbling, "Nothing, I was wondering how beautiful you look when you look at me like that in your angry pose," she came literally pouncing on me with her --if looks can kill--look and thundered,

"Isn't there a time and place for such romantic nonsense? I am asking you again, who was it that went to the bath room?"

May be the Indian railways' trains go off at a tangent and derail, but even God cannot deflect my wife from what she has to say. As a matter of fact, if the Indian Railways have my wife as their consultant to advise them on how to remain on track, I am confident

that there will be a significant improvement in their statistics of rail derailments.

From the way she had been questioning it was clear that I must have done something wrong and I ventured to ask her "You want to know when I went to the bath room?" That was it. All hell broke loose.

"How many times have I to tell you not to reply to a question with a dumb question again?. All these bad habits are due to the poor training your mother gave you."

The moment she commented about my mother, I was angry. I can tolerate any amount of criticism of me and my habits but I cannot take, lying down, anything said about my mother. I felt bold to tell her that I had been living with her for twice the number of years I had spent with my mother, and what she could not correct, my mother could certainly not be expected to do.

"Don't you remember the saying that you can pluck a sapling with your nail but if you tarry and let it grow you have to use a mighty axe to fell it? Any such bad habit can be corrected only when one is small but if it is allowed to go unchecked till adulthood it is impossible for anyone to shake it off."

After she dropped this gem of a quotation, I did not want to continue the argument and requested her to let me have my newspaper.

"As a matter of fact can't you spend your day without this newspaper? While I am struggling with so many chores to run the house, how can you sit there and while away your time coolly doing nothing? Earlier, I used to feel pity and let you get away with doing no



household chores, thinking that you must have had a rough and tiring day at work. Now that you are retired, do you think I will let you sit pretty while I slog in the house the whole day?"

When she so categorically said her piece, I knew that I could forget for the day any idea of continuing with my newspaper and the only thing left for me was to remain silent. If you thought that the storm had passed for the day, then I must say that you have not yet understood my better half. You cannot divert her attention by some conversation or other. Like the relentless *Vikramarka* in the "*Tales of Betala*", it is impossible to divert her attention from what she sets about to do. She demanded an answer to her first question.

It was quite some time since Seenu had gone to school. The servant maid had not yet come. Only the two of us were left in the house. So I replied that it had to be one of us two. This innocent reply set off sparks,

"I do not appreciate your levity. Do you take me for a nut? Why will I ask you if I went to the bathroom?"

When she looked at me like a hunter out for the kill, I suppressed the question which was almost on my lips, "Since I was the only other member present why all these mysterious queries?" I knew it was best that the question was left unasked as otherwise the whole thing would start all over again. Instead I meekly blurted out: "Okay, it must be me then, only me."

"That is much better. You have owned up to it at last! How many times have I told you to switch off the light as you leave the room? You are fond of lecturing for hours about energy conservation to all and

sundry, but how is it that you do not practice even an iota of it when it comes to what you do in your own house?"

Well, I admit that I committed a small slip. Consider how sharp and active every bit of our body and mind is, early in the morning! At such a time, don't you agree that it is a crime to waste so much time, energy and effort on such a small and trivial issue of not putting the light off after leaving the bathroom? Even if you agree do not say it loudly in front of my wife. It is not for nothing that it is said that discretion is the better part of valour.

## ***RAIL JOURNEYS***

I do not think that, apart from innocent children, anyone else would keenly look forward to a journey by rail in our country. As a matter of fact, except for some odd few, the thought of any travel would naturally be a tedious and tiresome prospect. In my childhood, during the days of the second world war, there were very few trains compared to the number now operating. There were then no reserved berths or seats for the third class, the type for middle class people like us. All the compartments were jam-packed with soldiers. I distinctly remember my brother, who was then studying in a college far away from our small home town, running from one end to the other of the train and returning home, unable to get into the train during the one or two minutes the train halted at our small wayside station. Those soldiers were shouting in strange tongues, occasionally even using their muscle strength to prevent any one to get inside and gesticulating that there was no room inside. Nowadays there are far better arrangements. The trains have a large number of reserved compartments. Unless one has to travel at short notice, travel can be in comfort seated or sleeping on a berth even in third class. There are, however, new types of obstacles and nuisances in our present day rail journeys.

Because of vast distances that one has to go within the town or city, the charges for commuting to and from the rail station by an auto-rickshaw or a taxi are perhaps even more than the rail fare itself. There is the nuisance of bargaining over the fare before one boards those conveyances, and another round of bargaining, after alighting, over the extra charge for the luggage. Because of more passengers there are now more trains. Because of more trains there are more rails and tracks at a station and there are huge over-bridges to negotiate. Sometimes I wonder whether these improvements are, after all, for the benefit of the licensed porters at the stations who charge quite exorbitantly. In the north one single porter carries quite a lot of luggage, but down south he cannot carry even one small suit case, but he haggles more than his northern counterpart. The incidental charges for the taxis and the porters are thus even more than the train fares.

It is another big story to talk about *tiffin* and meals in our trains. Thanks to my wife, we have been thoroughly spoilt by getting habituated to the type of South Indian filtered coffee prepared out of strong decoction made from freshly roasted and ground beans along with fresh milk. I am sure you will agree that the "Nescafe" coffee with powdered milk, which has become the standard all over our railways, leaves a bad taste in our mouths. In the good old days, at big stations in the south we used to get good South Indian coffee served in pots. With the cry of equality, these days, we get nothing but the watery "Nescafe" coffee at all stations, big and small.

About the meals on the trains, the less said the better. I remember those good old days of my

childhood when the meals served at the railway stations were superb. That dinner in a large hall, served on plantain leaves and all the diners seated on small wooden planks on the floor was the most satisfying one, though for people like me, who were slow in eating, it was a problem to finish the meals in the ten minutes in which the servers covered the courses in a quick and organised military parade fashion. For those fortunate ones who could order their meals to be brought into the upper class compartments, the meals were served in clean, big tiffin carriers with lots to eat including some special sweet dishes. The preparations were of a high standard and the very sight of those meals was mouth watering. Now the variety is less, and the quantities served are also less, though the tariffs have increased enormously. Don't you agree that the advent of casserole meals with the confusion of where to place that jumbled stuff and how to eat, has literally forced us to starve rather than order such meals?

However, if one travels with my wife, there is absolutely no worry either about the meals or the tedium of the journey. My wife packs a variety of home made snacks and food in tiffin carriers--rice, *parothas*, *purees*, vegetables, curd, pickles etc., suitable and sufficient for each day of the journey. There is enough and plenty, not only for us but also for an additional guest or two. At the time of getting into the train, while settling the luggage she may get into an argument with you reminding you that you cannot occupy the whole luggage space in the compartment. She might even order and hustle you to resettle your luggage so that all her stuff is settled properly, just like the way she orders me and our maid servant for rearranging our things in the house after a white-wash. But do not get upset. With

a little patience you will see for yourself how good travelling with her can be.

After the train starts and all her stuff has been stacked away properly, my wife is all smiles and she will start a conversation with your wife; if you are travelling alone and if she discerns the signs of a gentleman in your demeanour, she will start her conversation with you. She will first tell you all about our family and then she will find out from you all about your family. There is a ninety nine percent chance that after a short pow-wow with her, you will either turn out to be our relation or some friend of ours will turn out to be a friend or a childhood classmate of your friend. From then on there is no question of distinction as to we, you and your family except that we have to take her orders whenever the train stops at a big station. She will enumerate the goodies of each place-- is this Tadepalligudem? the *kovabillalu* at this place are marvelous--is this Rajahmundry? the *chakkarakelis* here are very sweet--oh, is this Anakapalle? the *jamikayalu* here are excellent and so on. I have to get down on to the platform and buy the special thing she mentioned. In case there is more than one specialty to be bought at a place there is work not only for me but for you also. You need not worry about the money as my wife is very generous and is ever ready with cash. When she hands the cash beforehand and requests with her--if you please--sweet smile, (I was doubtless bowled over by that smile long back) I guess you cannot also refuse her request.

Before the journey's end she will get your address and phone numbers and if any of your children are in the USA, she will ask you for their numbers also with an assurance -- "it does not matter even if they are

thousands of miles away from our children there. It is so easy for them to get in touch over phone and meet also by motoring down on a long week-end." She then commands me to jot them down in my diary. If either you or anyone known to you have any eligible brides or grooms, she will match them with anyone in our family or in a family known to us, and indicate possible matches to be progressed as match-making is her special hobby. If you have forgotten the tedium of even forty odd hours of the journey in these talks with her, it is no surprising matter at all. The best part is that at least half a dozen marriages have been fixed up, thanks to my wife's match-making efforts during her rail journeys.

## ***EXAMINATIONS***

"Seenu's examinations are approaching. You better not go out in the evenings on your club jaunts. I can coach him in everything other than mathematics and in particular the so-called mad modern mathematics. They are beyond me."

When my wife told me these words you might be imagining that Seenu may be in some tenth or twelfth standard. Seenu is in the sixth class. His examinations are still a month away. Someone of the old generation like me must be wondering why this fuss so early. These examinations and present day studies in general would no doubt appear weird and strange to us.

In our orthodox family our generation was the first to go for English education. My grandfathers were great pundits of *vedas* and they earned a great name for their scholarship, but my father's was the proverbial neither here nor there generation, neither proficient in the *vedas* nor in modern English education. My poor father was, therefore, totally ignorant of what we were studying. Yet when the examinations were approaching he would collect all of our books scattered all over the house, and ask us to check if what he collected was all what we were supposed to be studying for the examinations. Our method of silent studying was not to



his liking as it was different from the traditional vedic school study where everything is chanted and repeated aloud. He used to advocate our getting up and studying early in the morning as the best way of studying. Studying in the night, wasting whole daylight hours was something alien to him and he used to scold us that our attempt to study in the evening was something similar to the lazy weaver wanting to weave by candle light, having wasted the glorious daylight hours. Our method of studying was as strange to our father as my son's was to us. My son would never touch his books until the last minute before the examinations. Whiling away all the days in fun and frolics, he never touched his books until the examinations were imminent when his serious attempts to study would start. He would sleep the whole day on the plea that he had studied the whole of the night before.

Of all those who were supposedly well versed in the *Vedas*, only very few understood the meaning of what they were chanting. Likewise, of the so-called educated people of the present day, most of them have more or less learnt the subjects by rote and coughed them up in the examinations, being none the wiser afterwards. Apart from the fact that they cannot claim to have acquired even elementary worldly knowledge, even in the subjects of their specialisation, only one in a million can say that he understood the history of the development of his subject and the inspiration behind the work of the experts who had built up the subject. The degrees of education are merely enabling the holders to acquire jobs, but their contribution to either useful deeds or expansion of wisdom is pitifully insignificant.

If one should look at the examinations it is another strange story. One type requires the candidate to simply reproduce lengthy extracts of what he or she had learnt by heart. Another type decries the rote answers and instead claims to elicit understanding or comprehension and sets out what are called objective type questions. To make it easy for those who have to evaluate the answers, the examiner asks questions like: "How many legs does a cot have?" and asks the candidate to tick the right answer out of two, four, three and ten. With the advent of computers, they are asking the candidates to use a pencil or dot pen and fill in the right answer. As the candidates gamble, *eeney, meeny, ... mo*, and select one of the alternatives, their results are also likewise a real gamble. There is yet another school of thought which decries both the two types of examinations as not suitable and instead opts for the middle path involving a bit of essay writing and a bit of objective thinking solutions.

Whatever be the type of examination, what is its aim? Is it to find out whether the student has grasped the essential principles of whatever he was taught? Is it to determine how much he knows or does not know of the subject? After an in-depth study of the issue what I have learnt is that the subject of examinations is a profound one. It is wisely said that any fool can ask questions but not everyone can answer them. What we hear these days is that a change is necessary and every year there is a change in the examination system. There is also one theory that there should be no examinations at all.

Don't you agree that a cry for a change merely because it is the in-thing to call for a change, is a foolish exercise? As a result of frequent changes in the

type of examinations being brought about these days, the students are getting confused and bedevilled without any significant improvement in the end result. As I was reflecting on the various facets of the question of examinations, and had yet to reply to my wife's first directive, she brought me down to mundane reality by her reminder: "From tomorrow you have to stop your club outing and help Seenu to prepare for his ensuing examinations." All I can do after that is to convey my acceptance of her dictat.

## ***SCHOOL ADMISSIONS***

My wife reminded me in her inimitable way:

"Tomorrow you have to take off from work. Have you forgotten or what? We have to submit an application for our Syaam's admission to school."

Our grandson Syaam is two years old. He and his elder brother of three years age are staying with us here in India while their parents are in the USA, both working and unable to look after their two small sons. I ventured to remark,

"Why should I be there for submitting an application? You better go on your own."

"Do you think it is a joke to get an admission in these convent schools? They select only twenty out of hundreds who apply. There will be a test."

I was stunned to hear that they are going to test a two year old. His vocabulary consists of words with only one syllable. If you ask him the name of his grandmother he will say "la." If you ask him where he is going he will say "ba". If you ask him anything else, he will look at you and if he thinks you are the type to scold if he cannot answer, he will start howling. What is the talk of a test for such a tiny tot? For that matter, why this unholy hurry for his admission to a school? If I tell

my wife that in my childhood, the ceremony of *aksharabhyasam* for admission to school was not performed till I was four, I know she will cut me down to size with her retort: "Do you want everyone else also to grow up to be an ignoramus ruffian?" I merely said,

"What is the need for me also to be there for the little fellow's test? Is it not sufficient if you are there while they ask him those innocent little childish questions?"

"You really amaze me! What can a tiny tot like him answer? Who told you the test is for him? It is for us."

"Oh, I see! How should I prepare for it? What is the syllabus?"

My wife had a hearty laugh and said,

"It is not like that. They will ask you questions about your status, your position in the organisation you work for, your ability to arrange for donations to their school and if need be whether you have influence to secure train reservations in a hurry or whether you can arrange to bring cine stars or famous musicians for their school fund-raising functions etc. If you say you cannot do any of those things they will ask how much you can donate to the school."

"Then there is no need for us to go to that school as we can do none of the things you mentioned."

"You leave all that to me. You do not worry your head about anything. You simply put on your suit and come with me. During the conversation you just mention in passing that your aunt's father-in-law's brother-in-law Vasu is working in the Chief Minister's

secretariat. After that let me see who can deny us the victory."

"Vasu is a low paid clerk and I am not sure if he can even recognise us since we have so far never had any contact with him."

"We do not have to tell the truth. You come with me in your grand style, and say a few words the way you boast of your exploits in the office to me. That is all I ask of you."

I was astonished to hear my wife's assessment of the situation and it set me to ponder a little about this subject of school admissions. What is it that attracts the parents to rush to these convent schools for the admission of their wards? Is it the discipline in such schools? If middle class parents are turning away from our *zilla parishad* and municipal schools, the administrators of those schools as well as the Government need to undertake a little introspection. It is no use their being smug that there are enough students flocking to their schools and it does not matter if some middle class folks are not patronising their schools. It means that they are not behaving responsibly and are failing to live up to the trust the public had in electing them - as their representatives. After our independence and thereafter the creation of the linguistic states and the rise of the dictatorship of the Hindi zealots of the North, the very same leaders who were loudly demanding the abolition of English, when it came to their own wards, are rushing to have them admitted in these convent schools with English medium of instruction. They are also sending their children abroad. How can one describe their behaviour?

To which type of schools did all the people of our generation and now occupying high positions go? Ninety nine percent, they must have gone to these public schools and similar colleges only. What are the reasons for their present degeneration? It is too simplistic to attribute it to a change of the language of instruction from English to the vernacular language. Discipline and accountability of teachers are lacking in these institutions. There may be an argument that the salaries of the teachers are low. This could be true but only up to a point. Look at the salaries of the teachers in the central schools? Can we honestly say that they are unreasonably low in comparison with others in our society? What is the cause for their pitiable state? Unless the answers to these questions are understood and until those who understood them and are willing to implement measures to improve the situation are elected as our public figures and leaders, there can be no salvation. There will be real progress in our country only when society respects and upholds the prestige of the teachers.

Why should we invite and felicitate the pseudo leaders for every little function? Is it necessary to make it a big inauguration affair for replacement of the old doors in our public lavatories? Should we go after and beg these leaders to come and do the inauguration of such trivial matters? My thoughts on these lines were rudely interrupted and I was pulled back to reality by my wife's reminder, "I say, don't forget to take a day off tomorrow."

Who can predict what is going to happen tomorrow in Syaamu's admission test?

## ***THE CINEMA CRAZE***

When my wife suggested that we go to see a movie in the evening, I reminded her, without taking off my eyes from the newspaper I was reading, that our children were visiting us in another ten days and we can go then. She burst out:-

"When they are here who is going to ask you? Then it does not matter whether you come or not. I merely asked because it is so many days since we both went out together anywhere. More over this movie is one you would like. All your favorite stars, Savitri, Jamuna, Nageswara Rao and Rama Rao are acting in it."

I was tempted and agreed that we could go. She said that it was no use saying yes and sitting quietly after that. She asked me to go immediately and book the seats in advance. I tried to put it off by saying,

"There will be no rush to the type of old films we are interested in. Wait and see. We will be the only people in the whole big hall there. If by the mischance of the sun rising in the west, we fail to get seats, we can happily return back home."

She kept quiet making that mocking gesture to suggest that nothing better could be expected from me.



Perhaps the very fact that I had said yes was enough for the day!

Look at the significant change that the cinema has wrought in our society! In our younger days there were at the most one or two movie halls in a town. In small places a touring movie talkies used to be the center of attraction for a month or two of its operation in that place. There were not even ten Telugu movie releases in a year. Most of the movies shown then were either Tamil or Hindi movies. There was no big rush for movie tickets. When a Hindi movie was being screened there used to be the *tamasha* of an interpreter. The interpreter used to crack his own jokes and his babble used to be louder than the dialogues in the movie. By contrast now there are movie halls in almost every street and the new Telugu movie releases in a year are in the hundreds. There are hero worshipping societies for each of the big movie stars and several cine magazines and countless other crazy things related to the cine world. In the movies-- cabaret dances, obscene dialogues, fist fights and indecent exposures have replaced the old classical music and dances, good plot, dialogues and family stories of social relevance. Of the cinemas now released, may be one in a hundred can be rated as good to support the adage that the exception proves the rule.

Whenever we visited our home State on vacations, my wife's first question was invariably about the new movies in town. Then the consultation with our servant maid Lachi followed. Lachi would see every movie in town and if she opined that a particular movie was good enough to see once, it meant that she did not like it and it was suitable for old folks of our generation. If she said that a movie was very good, she must have

seen it at least three or four times and it was definitely not for people like me.

It is true that this movie craze is common to all the States in our country, but in Andhra Pradesh and also to an equal degree in South India, the strange thing to notice is that besides movies there does not seem to be any other form of recreation. For that matter if movies are banned in the South India, the gossip among the neighbours and in fact the conversation in general will vanish. If movie stars are not there, where else can you look for political leaders and Chief Ministers?

A good many number of people from our States in the South behave as if there is nothing else for entertainment or recreation other than movies or the movie world gossip and juicy star scandals. Students rarely ever visit libraries. What they buy and read are only cine magazines. In these cine magazines, the new movie releases and their plots or stories are no longer the important topics featured. Who is cheating on whom, who is sleeping with whom, whose baby it really is, what stars are busy abusing each other along with pin-ups or cut-outs of the glamorous stars are the items that sell in them.

If we seriously examine the reasons for cinemas to gain such a profound influence on our society, it becomes apparent that other changes in our lifestyles are directly responsible for this. With population ever increasing, open spaces for play and games have become rare in the concrete jungles our towns and cities have become. We do not know what they learn in our schools and colleges. After they come home, by the time they complete their tuition and home assignments it gets dark. No one listens to the radio except for the film songs. Even on TV the only popular

programmes are the movies or the song sequences in the movies. The youth and industrial workers particularly in towns and cities return from their work places late in the evening, dog tired after tedious bus and train journeys in addition to the grind in the offices. All that is left for them is to rest and retire for the day.

The lot of the elderly in present times is still more pitiable. As a consequence of the industrial revolution, the joint family system has disappeared. Moreover, in time of their need the hardened *rupees* of that generation, are worth not as many *paise* due to the ravages of inflation. They have become living corpses unable even to have one meal a day. In this situation it is impossible for the patronage of the fine arts and fine pieces of poetry or literature. It is also impossible for a healthy development of sports and other pastimes. All that is left is this escapist cinema entertainment only.

## ***GRATIS, BARGAIN AND BRIBE***

"Look how beautiful this pan is! It is not too deep and it is not too shallow. It has such nice rings to handle."

When my wife came gushing with those remarks about the beauty of the pan she had bought, I could not fathom what beauty she was referring to in that ugly object and my expression must have given me away.

"How will you recognise the beauty in this pan? If however I make *boorelu* in this, you will know how to eat them without any count, demanding to be served again and again. Do you know how much he demanded for this? There is no limit to his greed. He asked thirty rupees for this. After haggling he came down to thirteen rupees."

My wife was so happy with her bargain that I got a bonus smiling look that made my day. My wife is not an exception in this craze for a bargain; almost everybody hopes for a good bargain though with varying degrees of zeal and expectation. When it comes to gratis, the person I recall immediately is my grandmother. She never let off a vegetable vendor unless she herself picked up from the vendor's basket an additional four *vankayilu* as gratis to the dozen she had

bought from him. When the vendor started howling his protest, she would throw a *vankayee* back into the basket and signal her decision to end the sale by throwing the money due to the vendor into the basket and quickly walking away with the purchase made. The street vendor shouting "*Vankayilu, vankayilu*" would, on spotting my grandmother at the door step, stop his yells and silently go past the door ignoring my grandmother until he was three houses away before he started his yelling "*vankayilu, vankayilu*" again. When she knew from the voice that it was an old vendor, she would ask me; "Look, Buchi, you stop that vendor and buy the vegetables" as she was sure he would not like to sell her anything again after his last experience. That *gratis* was prevalent in western countries also in earlier days is evident in the English term, "baker's dozen" which means thirteen and not twelve. This practice of *gratis* is now defunct in almost all the countries, but bargains are very much prevalent in several countries.

Even in those countries where there are no bargains, there is a big attraction called "sale" which lures the customers. There is always some sale or the other-- festival sales, summer sales, winter sales, back-to-school sales and so on. When they see that the actual price is a hundred and the sale price is fifty, people purchase it, whether they need it or not. In certain times such as the Christmas and New Year sales, crowds of people mill around the displayed goods like bees in a bee-hive and snatch whatever pieces they can lay their hands on like kites and gloat over the fine bargains they have made. When we see them it becomes clear that human nature is the same everywhere. That nobody sells anything unless he makes a profit out of it may be brushed aside as the die-hard opinion of people like me.

It is a fact, though, that I do not know how to bargain. Even if I ventured to bargain, I cannot help wondering if, after all, I was not cheated by the vendor. At such times I do envy people like my wife who not only can bargain but also invariably come back feeling extremely satisfied.

In the developing countries there is an interesting thing like a sale though it is called "seconds". They are the manufactured goods rejected as not conforming to the superior standards stipulated for their export to the developed countries. Unless one examines them closely the flaws in them are not noticeable and they look quite attractive and acceptable for common people like you or me. It is quite common to see many among us buying these seconds at much higher prices than similar articles they are used to buying and gloating over their good fortune in locating the seconds.

Granted that bargaining is prevalent in some form or other in almost all the countries, the bribe so distinctively termed "*mamoolu*", perhaps a deep rooted practice more in the developing countries. Even though we have been hearing this term "*mamoolu*" for centuries, it is not an exaggeration to state that the extent of its practice has increased at least by a hundred times since our independence. The first time I heard this word as a lad was from our farmers. After the sugarcane had been crushed and the "*gur*" had been made in slabs, the farmers had to bring them to our town market, loading them in bullock carts. As the carts approached the check post at the municipality limits, they were required to pay something like an octroi called "*aseelu*" in Telugu, to the clerk posted at the check post. They were invariably required to pay "*mamoolu*" to the

municipal clerk, and the *mamoolu* was even more than the *aseclu* as otherwise the carts could not enter the town. Afterwards when I grew up a little more, I heard this in the conversations of ladies in the train compartments. "What does your husband do? How much is the pay? How much does he earn over that?", were the common questions asked of one another and that too in a loud voice in the hearing of co-passengers. It then became apparent to me that this *mamoolu* was something of a right of every employee, the public servant in particular. Later as I see it, it is everywhere and anywhere. I can cite the example of a distant relation. He was an ordinary low paid clerk in the office of the overseer. There was no inheritance of any property or money. Before he retired, he married off half a dozen of his daughters with dowry and expensive gifts. He owned a big house in our town along with some lands near our town. That he could do all this and earn as much in his small ill paid job speaks volumes for the miracles the "*mamoolu*" can perform.

There is no question of this job or that, this organisation or that. It rules everywhere. The advent of the institution of license *raj* and the *mamoolu* have enabled every public servant to prosper. In this situation the middle class people alone are suffering with the quality of their lives going down-hill day by day. In this middle class also there are now two subclasses, the upper and the lower middle classes. Their distinction lies in their ability to lament about their plights. The lower are those who can unashamedly lament in public while the upper cannot. It is indeed true that this *mamoolu*, or the bribe is the worm rotting and destroying the pillars of our society. At this rate a time

will soon come when even for enjoying a fresh breeze,  
we will have to pay *mamoolu* to some fellow or some  
organisation!



## ***TRUST BEGETS TRUST***

"Look here, there is a letter from our son. Usually they come here for their vacation. This time they want us to go to their place. He is taking a week off and he will take us to Agra and other famous places nearby. Our daughter-in-law will also have her vacation then and wouldn't it be nice if we can spend a fortnight or so all together?"

My wife came inside in good spirits, talking about and reading the letter at the same time. I have no patience for the long train journey and told her so while still immersing myself in the pages of the newspaper and suggested that if she felt like it she could go on her own.

"When your brothers or sisters plead with you that you need not visit them, under some pretext or other you are prepared to dash off either to Tatanagar or Trivandrum. You do not have to change trains. You get in here and get off at their place and the journey does not take even one full day. How does it trouble you? What is the big thing you are going to do staying back here? Ever since you retired all that you do the whole day is goof around doing nothing."

When my wife said her piece in no unmistakable way, I knew that I could not escape this

journey and I agreed that I would go with her as she wished.

"We do not have even full ten days time. Don't you know how difficult it is to get train reservations? I say, why don't you look in the newspaper about the status of reservations to Delhi by A.P.express?"

"Even if it is reported in the newspaper that there are vacancies for the day we want, actually by the time we go there to the reservation counter, that fellow is going to send us back saying, "Sorry. No vacancy."

"I tell you! When any one asks you to say something good, how is it that never a good word comes out of your mouth? Have you not read in the newspapers to say that after computerisation has streamlined everything, it is so easy to get the reservations?"

I wanted to point out to my wife the inconsistency in her statements about packing me off saying that reservations are difficult to secure and in the next breath lecturing me about the reports of easy availability after computerisation. However, as I knew that it would provoke another one of her outbursts, I told her that I would go to the reservation office after lunch and my usual siesta.

"I have not even started to cook the lunch. It would take at least another hour or two. It is also too soon for lunch. You are already dressed. Take a *kanduah* and get going."

When she literally pushed me out of the house, almost catching me by the scruff of my neck and shoving me out, I had to get ready and set out to the

reservation office. As I was leaving she halted me in my tracks to say,

"Just a minute. Did you think about the day for which the tickets are to be purchased?"

"You have already told me that we have to be in Delhi in another ten days. I will buy for any date they are available which gets us there before that date."

"Well, if they are available for tomorrow will you buy for tomorrow? How can we go empty handed to our children? At least a few of the cookies and snacks our son likes will have to be prepared. More over don't we have to look at the calendar and select an auspicious day? Wait, let me consult the calendar."

As my wife went towards the *puja* room to get the calendar, I wondered how a modern science graduate like my wife would go for this sort of ritual. I really wonder if she truly believes in the daily and weekly astrological predictions. If she finds in one weekly that the findings are not to her liking she will consult another and yet another till she finds something flattering her ego. The strange thing is that anybody patient enough to scan different magazines will find a forecast in one magazine or other stating that there is going to be a windfall and romance is in the offing etc. I can say this for certain because I have first hand experience of this in my house. If she gets it into her head, she does not care whether the forecast is good or bad, and goes ahead with what she sets out to do. She says then: "They may write anything, but where is our common sense if we believe in such trash?"

She returned with the calendar in hand and said,

"Well, it says in this that either the coming Friday or Sunday are good days to start our train journey. If you book for Friday it would be convenient for them also to come to the station and pick us up because it will be Saturday, a holiday, when we reach there. Any way there is sufficient time and it should be possible to get tickets for the day we want. If for any reason they are not available on these two days do not come back empty handed saying *upch, upch*. What else can we do but take them for any day available after the coming Friday?"

She pointed the door to me after her detailed instruction. The bus stop is about a ten minute walk from my house. On the way I stopped at the Appalaswamy's *pan* shop and ordered a *zarda killi* and a cigarette. Even an inferior brand of cigarette tastes nice with a *killi* and enjoying the smoke, blowing perfect rings of smoke into the air, I reached the bus stop. The office going rush did not seem to be over as yet. I thought it would not be a bad idea if I had a cup of coffee and peacefully went through the newspaper in the nearby Mani Iyer restaurant, and accordingly I went in that direction.

In the restaurant the morning rush was over. There were only a few patrons, people like me without any business. No sooner had I sat at an empty table, than a server boy landed from somewhere with a dirty cloth and after cleaning the table with it set down a glass of water with at least two of his dirty fingers inside the water. He then looked at me with a questioning look for my order. Keeping the glass of water at arm's length, I gave my order of a cup of coffee, cursing myself for the fate of having to take my coffee in such dirty surroundings. As I opened my

newspaper I saw through the corner of my eye, Seshavataram, son of a distant cousin entering the restaurant. I shouted "Hey, Seshu" and beckoned him to my table. Seshu, about forty years old, is a small clerk working for the railways and lives in the same part of our town. As the server brought me coffee I passed it on to him and ordered another cup for myself. While he started sipping his coffee and while I was waiting for my order to materialise, I started the conversation:

"Isn't it a bit late for the office?"

"My boss has gone out of town and today I am my own boss in the office. That is okay. But what is the news? Is auntie well?"

"All well at home. I set out to go to the reservation office and finding it still crowded at the bus stop I thought that I would while away some time over a cup of coffee here."

"Why do you trouble yourself for this small thing? I have to go that way only for my work. I will do the reservations and give you the tickets at your house tomorrow morning."

I was relieved to hear his kind offer and told him the details of the preference and the alternatives, while handing him the estimated amount of the charges. Seshu did not suffer from any inferiority complex when he started to tell me,

"Why do you underestimate my influence? Don't you know that I work for the railways? If I cannot get you the tickets for the day you want, what is the use of my working with the railways?"

Seshu finished his coffee and bade me good-bye, promising to see me the next day on his way to the

office. I thanked the good fortune that had brought Seshu to me and relieved the botheration of bus journeys and the wait in the queue at the reservation office. I enjoyed my cup of coffee and the newspaper at leisure and returned home in another fifteen minutes.

As soon as I reached home, my wife looked at me anxiously and asked,

"What is the matter? Are you alright? Why have you returned so quickly? Wait, I will be back in a minute with a glass of water and meanwhile you had better rest in that chair."

After I had the water she gave me, I calmly told her about Seshu and the good luck of avoiding the trip to the reservation office.

"Oh my goodness, don't you know about Seshu? He is a real cheat. He does talk sweetly and after gaining the confidence of people, he runs away with some booty. If you trust him you can forget our reservations. I do not understand why you had to go here and there without going straight to the reservation office. As soon as you finish your lunch you go straight to Seshu's office and take the tickets from him. If he has not done anything by then, you better take back the money and do the reservations yourself."

I felt a little guilty but did not want to give in so easily. I told her that I was not feeling well and I would wait till the morning of the next day and if Seshu did not turn up as promised I would go to his office and do the rest. She appeared really concerned about my health and suggested that it was all right and bade me rest till she had finished her cooking due to be completed soon. When she went back to the kitchen, there were tears in

my eyes, I must confess, to see how much she fussed over me.

When Seshu walked in with his yell, "Auntie!", my wife was all smiles and welcomed him with questions about the welfare of his family and of his parents. She asked him to have his breakfast along with us since we were about to eat. Seshu had more than his fill and took leave of us handing over the tickets and the balance amount, announcing the fact that he could obtain the tickets only for the Sunday, our second preference. My wife was all praise for Seshu and his goodness to help us. I felt like humming the lines of the popular Telugu saying: "Nobody suffers by trusting others, though some may suffer for not trusting", but I did not want to spoil the good mood she was in by saying it aloud. Instead I took refuge in the pages of my newspaper and had a good laugh at her expense.

## ***GREED***

When our Avataram *mamayya* (uncle Avataram) visited us we, the children, were always very happy. Like the Lord *Vishnu* sleeping on the coils of the giant snake, *Adi Seshu*, he would lie flat on the mat with his palm supporting his neck, and would tell us stories for hours. He laid only one condition. We had to give our alert signal by responding with *umhu* as he went along with his narration. If *umhu* stopped the narration of the story stopped. The story of "*Laddey veyavey gurrama*" used to fascinate us most. A poor fellow is conned into buying a horse which would excrete gold and after he has parted with his cash for the horse, he comes home and finds that what the horse excretes is not gold but horse shit despite his chanting of the mantra "*laddey veyavey gurrama*". We used to laugh heartily at the foolishness of the fellow for letting himself be conned so easily.

In our childhood we used to even play truant to watch any road-side magic show, the whole show from the beginning to the end. The magician used to call for a volunteer from the crowd and make fun of him. He used to hand him a rupee and a little later demand him to return the rupee he was given. The poor fellow would search all his pockets and not finding any rupee, would plead that he was not given any rupee. As the poor



fellow was weeping, the magician would chant a *mantra* and then by his magic release rupees from the nose, ears and every other conceivable part of the body of the hapless victim.

You may be under the impression that people get fooled only in stories and in magic shows! God has induced this desire or greed in almost all of mankind from the day they are born. Unless one is consumed by a desire, one may not make any attempts to attain it. Education, culture and probity teach mankind to channel its desires to useful goals and preach that one should not be greedy and ask for the impossible. Yet there are many who are greedy, and con artists are able to thrive only because of such greedy people. A strange phenomenon we see is that the prey to these con artists are not necessarily dullards or nitwits but very often well educated and so called intelligent people among us.

We were then in Calcutta. Our Chief Engineer was an able and intelligent man. At work he used to exhort everyone to be logical and resolve all problems only on the basis of a detailed analysis of the data and scientific scrutiny. But he himself invested in an organisation called *Sanchayita*, which was promising a return of over forty percent; he was also advising others in our office to invest likewise. I was amazed at this. I did not have any surplus to invest in anything at all but I had my doubts about *Sanchayita*. I would query as to what type of industry or agriculture this organisation was investing its resources in and earned such profits so as to be able to give such high interests to its creditors. In the so-called heavy industries there is only prestige but the profits are very small. If they make even a five percent return on their investment, it is a great thing. In

the manufacture of consumer articles and their sale, a return of about twenty percent is quite creditable. In agriculture there never was, and so it is even now, any profit at all. After giving such high interest to their creditors, how is this *Sanchayita* able to survive? To such a question from me, my good chief would reply that it was not for us to pry into their possible nefarious business. Within two years the company declared bankruptcy and the investors could not recover even a paisa for every rupee they put in it. All this *Sanchayita* affair was fully known to my wife. Yet how greed mesmerizes people now and then became apparent the moment my wife came running all agog with her news and a proposition.

"Every article is being sold at half its manufacturer's catalogue price in that shop. Our neighbour Sundari *garu* bought a colour TV for only four thousand rupees. Visalakshi *garu* of that next street bought a big refrigerator for only six thousand rupees. Shall we also buy a VCR? I believe it is going for only six thousand rupees. We shall never get a chance like this."

When my wife was so ecstatic about the unbelievable bargain, I did not want to disappoint her and so I suggested that we go to that shop and bring our VCR.

"That is not it, darling. We go to the shop, select the model and pay the amount. They will make arrangements with the company and as soon as the article is received by them they will advise us when we can go and take delivery. How can you expect them to have ready stocks of every thing people might want to buy? You must give them some reasonable time to make the arrangements."

"I do not like this kind of purchase. I am not prepared to give my money in advance on the basis of such wild promises. We can order and when they are ready to deliver, we will go and take delivery paying them the bargain price they quoted."

"I knew that you would say that. When did you ever in your life listen and perform any worthwhile task? It was my naivete to have asked you in the first place."

I stood my ground despite her angry outburst and did not prolong the conversation by remaining silent. We both have forgotten this business since.

One day when I was out with my wife, we saw a big commotion in front of a shop in the main *bazaar*. A big crowd had gathered there and they were all shouting. *Lathi* wielding police was trying to disperse the crowd and some people were running away from there to escape the *lathi* charge. One of those retreating gave us his tale of woe. It appears that he had lost several thousands in the scam of the so-called half price gimmick of that *shop-wallah* whose shop was being mobbed by foolish people like him. He told us that they had cheated several people and vanished suddenly without any trace. Nobody knew where they had come from and where they have gone. My wife exclaimed, "Oh my God! It was a good thing that we did not get cheated, thanks to you, my dear. You are a gem." When she praised me like that, I must be honest, my heart melted and my love for her flowed out which must have been transparent to any one who saw me then.

In every country there are greedy people who become laughing stocks. You find them in every segment of the society they live in, rich or poor,

educated or uneducated and so on. The numbers falling victims to scams are in the *laks* while those cheats who get caught and punished are comparatively only very few. Why should we blame the one who dangles the bait? For those greedy and falling prey to the bait, despite their intelligence and common-sense, I believe that we need not have any sympathy and should in fact be happy that they got their due retribution for being greedy.

## ***TRANSFERS***

I was then eight years old and my brother was thirteen. We were to go to my uncle's place to spend our summer vacation. The passenger trains never ran to time, and they do not even now. More over those were the days of the second world war. My father's hustling was phenomenal. If the scheduled time for the arrival of a train was, say, seven a.m. he would ask us to leave our house for the station, which was only a ten minute walk, at five a.m. itself. For us it was our first train journey. So we set out enthusiastically and reached the station at about five thirty in the morning. The passenger train arrived after ten a.m. Instead of reaching our destination Tanuku by lunch time, we were there by about five p.m. I think my brother was given some money but he did not venture to spend any of it on the way. We did not have even a glass of water and we landed in Tanuku thirsty and hungry. Thanks to our grandmother being orthodox, we couldn't have anything to eat until we had had our baths. That meal our grandmother served us after nearly twelve hours of the breakfast "*chaldivannam*", was like nectar and I can still recall that wonderful flavour and fragrance!

Within a month after we arrived in Tanuku, they said that my uncle was transferred. My uncle said that there was no time to lose in selecting an auspicious date etc., Our grandmother nevertheless consulted the

calendar and saw that the hour we were to leave for the railway station was not considered good. At that time there was "*varjyam*". To every situation there is a remedy even in the books of orthodoxy. Grandmother declared that "*parasthanam*" should resolve this difficulty. So she gave me one of the bundles we were to take on our journey and asked me to deposit in the house of her friend living at the end of the street. The next day, as we were leaving the house for the station she asked me to bring the bundle along; without bringing it inside the house again we left. Since the bundle had been removed from the house at an auspicious time we had fooled the *varjyam* in force at the actual time of our departure!

Since the government pays for the transport on transfer, we got into an inter class compartment. The compartment was empty and it looked as if it was reserved exclusively for our family. Apparently an accommodation for rent had already been fixed up at Kovvuru, the place my uncle was transferred to. Since we brought everything with us, grandmother could start her cooking within minutes of reaching that place. The accommodation was a portion of a house with the owner staying in the bigger portion. The landlady came over in the afternoon and started the gossip. We heard her asking our grandmother if we would be going to school in that town. We brothers had a big laugh when we heard our grandmother telling her that she had already had enough of us in the one month we had spent with them and she was looking forward to the day we would be gone to our own place at the end of the summer vacation.

My next experience of a transfer was when I took up service on the Indian Railways. My first

transfer was from Calcutta to Danapur and I was still a bachelor then. I went to Danapur with one suitcase. I was given there a big bungalow and befitting the status of an officer, I purchased a sofa, dining table, chairs and plates and crockery along with a few utensils for cooking. Though I was still a bachelor the household stuff did increase. From Danapur I was again transferred to Asansol within six months. I worked till five p.m. in the office and in half an hour I packed my belongings and left. Every piece of the furniture and the rest of the household stuff arrived intact with no damages or breakages. Subsequently I got married and the pieces to move increased enormously along with many transfers to be implemented. In all there were about seventy suitcases, almirahs, sofas, refrigerator, TV and VCR etc. My wife would take great pains to pack starting her preparations at least ten days before the day the stuff is to be moved. Every piece was wrapped in paper or gunny cloth and protected by a layer of hay but at least a couple of pieces got broken or damaged during each transfer. When I talked of the experience of transfers as a bachelor with no breakages she would brush it aside as a fluke. In all I had over fifteen transfers in my service and of them only two or three are worth mentioning to highlight what I have to say about the subject of transfers.

By that time I had already my two year old daughter and the son was about to complete his first year. We were very happy in Calcutta with a nice bungalow in the Liluah railway colony and a nice club with very good recreational facilities. Without consulting my wife I had asked for a transfer from the Headquarters to a District in Mughalsarai as I felt that it was good for me to gain field experience. Then my

word still counted in the house. Of-course it is a different matter afterwards as happens to be the case in every family. She cried when she learnt of the transfer. She cried all the more when I told her that I asked for the transfer as Mughalsarai was a small place and it did not have a club. The number of officers of my rank at that place were only two or three. My wife had a lot of help in servant-maids and gardeners. The children were very happy playing in the big garden attached to the house. After the office work I had no club to run to and I could spend more time with my family. My wife was very happy there and no sooner had we thought we were nicely settled there, than I was given another order of transfer back to Calcutta. Another colleague was in desperate need to be posted to Mughalsarai and to oblige him this transfer order was issued. Even before I got my copy of the office order he landed with bag and baggage to take my place. My wife was again in tears at the prospect of the move. The farewell we got from Mughalsarai from all of them wishing us well and sending us off gracefully decorating the whole compartment as if we were off on our honeymoon is still fresh in our memory.

A transfer is invoked to enable an employee to gain experience in the various facets of the working in the administration. It also helps one to escape getting into a rut and losing interest in the same job, day after day. A very important reason, specially in the Government, is that no one gets set in a position of influence and uses it for illegal gratification.

But a transfer is really a nuisance! It means a new place, a new environment and a new circle of friends. Admissions to schools and colleges in each place are a daunting prospect. If a change of State is



involved, there is the question of a new language to be learnt besides the difficulty for admissions for wards from out of State. In the few central schools where this botheration is not there, there is no guarantee of admissions. For that also there are many priorities. If the child is not from a central school it is almost impossible for one to get admission. If there is any sick person to take care of, the question may also arise as to whether the necessary treatment would be possible in the new place.

There is one strange thing in the issue of transfers. If everyone has to carry out the transfers, each according to their turn, there can be a consolation in the fact that you are one of the many in the misery. But there are several exceptions who by virtue of their influence manage to stay put in the same place without any transfers. Even if they shift to a new place, it is only because it suits them and they also move at a time of their convenience only. For simple folks like us, even if we have genuine problems and beg our higher-ups to consider either cancellation of a transfer order or at least a deferment, we get the boot and have to move immediately at any cost. At such times this inequity becomes really intolerable.

The most deplorable thing in this transfer affair is the political interference. A Minister is supposed to be concerned with only policy and not interfere in day-to-day administration which is supposed to be left to the civil service officials. But this principle is evident these days only in its blatant violation. One might wonder as to what the big-wigs in the civil administration are doing in this political corruption. If one cares to examine this question, what they will find out is the unholy nexus between the top civil administrators and

their political bosses of Ministers. For their own selfish ends these civil administrators seek favours and get them, thanks to the Ministers, even though they know full well that what they are seeking is immoral and illegal to say the least. In return for the favours from the Minister, they ditto anything and everything he wants. As our native saying goes: "If a fence you put up to guard your crop from poachers and animals is itself eating away your crop, to whom can you then turn for protection?"

## ***CASTE AND CREED DIVIDE***

In history we have read of the devastating influence of caste and religious intolerance but our own experiences, perhaps, teach us better. I hail from an orthodox Hindu brahmin family. Our forefathers were scholars and pundits in the *vedas* but all that ended with the generation of our grandfathers. In our childhood we used to listen to a little bit of "*vedaparayana*", the chanting of the *vedas*. I believe that in our grandfather's days, non-brahmins used to remove their *chappals* and carry them in their hands as long as they were in our street. In my childhood our elders used to shout and command us to quickly shut the main doors of the house lest they might sight some *sudra* while they were performing *puja*, ceremonial rites or even busy eating. Then it became apparent to us that there were times when *sudras* should not even be seen by the higher caste brahmins. After my father had his lunch and his afternoon siesta, the very same *sudras*, our farmers, were welcomed into our house and my father used to chat with them for hours on end, enquiring about the welfare of every one in their families like a true friend. That told us that *sudras* also were our close friends. For any function in our house, all of our relations and friends were given a sumptuous feast. At those feasts the last batch to be served were the farmers. My father

would serve them himself and coax them to have more and still more till they would beg him not to force them any more. Looking at father at such times, I always wondered, whether it was the same man who would sometimes shout at us to shut the door to keep them out of sight!

In our childhood days, in December every year, the idols of Gods in the different temples of our town were daily taken on a palanquin ride through the streets. On hearing that distinct sound of drums and instrumental music called "*baja bhajan treelu*", we used to rush to the street verandah shouting "God is coming, God is coming" with a plate full of rice, flowers, camphor balls and a few paise as offerings to the God, when the palanquin stopped at our door step. After the priest accompanying the procession performed the "*harati*" with the camphor balls in the plate, we used to put our hands to the fire on the plate and return with the plate empty of the rice and the cash but with a few of the flowers as the God's gift for the day. In those processions of the Gods the priest from the Bhogalingeswara temple had three cross lines of sandal paste on his forehead, and the priest of the Venkateswaraswamy temple had three vertical lines on his forehead. One was an *Iyer* and the other an *Iyyengar*. We then understood that whatever be the denomination of the *pujaris* or their Gods, they were all equally to be revered.

In those days Ansari was our tailor. He used to wear a big topee and we used to call him *sayabu*. He was a Muslim and though he spoke Telugu only, it was with a peculiar accent, a mixture of Urdu and Telugu tongues. Our mother would always call for him only, though there were many other Hindu tailors in our town

because Ansari was a good tailor and his charges were reasonable. Similarly my eldest brother used to have a classmate and a close friend in Alikhan. Alikhan's mother would bring us crystal sugar called "*patika panchadara*" every year after the results were announced, in celebration of her son's success in the annual examinations. Even after Alikhan finished school and started working, she would often come to our house for a gossip with our mother. Invariably her talk would finally end in her assertion that her daughter-in-law was a tartar and her grandson was a dear. This told us that the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law syndrome transcends all religious differences.

It was always understood that a religious divide was no bar for a peaceful living together as friends, until the time we were all worried about the safety of our eldest brother who was then in Delhi for his post-graduate studies and Hindu-Muslim riots broke out there. We heard of the two communities killing each other and several people fleeing to safer places far away with just their bare clothes and thanking the Lord for saving their lives. When our brother arrived home safe and told us how the Sikhs guarded and protected the Hindus during those riots, we understood that Sikhs are our brothers who took up their vow to wield the sword only for the protection of Hindus.

The caste divide was glaringly brought to our attention by the movie of our childhood days, "*malapilla*". In that movie a brahmin boy and a girl from the *mala* subsect of the *sudra* caste fall in love and the social divide is brought into a sharp focus. When we used to hum some songs of that movie our elders used to shout and curse that the movies were destroying the purity and chastity of the upper class brahmins and their

brahminism. Gandhiji took up the issue of the practice of untouchability against the *malas* as his number one crusade, even ahead of his fight for independence, and campaigned vigorously for the cause of their upliftment and restoration of their dignity as fellow humans.

For sometime I thought that if one was a brahmin, everyone would respect him and that he would never have to face any inequity. We got our independence and I finished my Intermediate when for the first time it dawned on me that a brahmin could also suffer some discrimination. For admission to engineering colleges, the marks one secured in the Intermediate examination were no longer the sole criterion. A government decree stipulating only a limited number of seats to brahmins with a quota for each district came into force. Because the quota for our district was only two seats a university ranking brahmin boy from our district could not secure a seat in the engineering college. Then I knew of snags in being born even as a brahmin. I felt a little jealous of the good fortune of those who got seats in the engineering college even with far less marks. but I did not have any feeling of hatred towards the non-brahmins.

When I was in the North serving the railways, I came to know that this madness of castes and caste distinctions is even more virulent there, particularly more among the people from Bihar. When two working people of Bihar met they seemed to get closer and become friends only if they both belonged to the same caste. In the outhouses of our bungalow there were five families living at that time. They all used to help us in some chore or other in the upkeep of our bungalow. Our cook was also staying with his family in one of the outhouses. One day one lady from one of those

outhouses hailing from Bihar performed the "*chhat puja*", a great festival of Bihar, and gave us the "*prasad*", samples of a few special dishes she had prepared as offering to their God. We ate those dishes with relish. That evening our cook who was also from Bihar did not report for his cooking duty. Later when we enquired of him for the cause of his absence, we were astounded to hear him say that he could not cook in our house that evening as we ate the dishes that the lady from the untouchable caste had given us. I asked him that if as a brahmin I did not have any objection to eating what the lady gave, why he, a *sudra*, should have any reservations. He replied that he was a *yadav* and gave me a look suggesting that I should know better than asking such a silly question.

We were then in a suburb of Calcutta. I do not know what caused those Hindu-Muslim clashes to erupt. For two whole days and nights all the neighbourhood Muslims took shelter in a mosque adjacent to our house. There was police patrolling in the colony and there was no danger of any clashes in our colony; yet they were afraid and did not venture to come out of their hide-out even if it meant starvation. I can to this day recollect the anxiety, fear and agony apparent in their eyes as they watched the outside world through a window upstairs in the mosque.

How can one describe the carnage and the atrocities perpetrated in the name of religion, when countless innocent people were butchered, in those four days following the day Indira Gandhi was assassinated? The very same Hindus, who gave one son from each of their families to take Sikh vows and way of living, intoxicated by religious bigotry, committed terrible and heinous crimes on the Sikhs who took up arms only for

protection of the Hindus and for justice and peace in this world.

As if our cup of misery was not full, there came two more disasters, in the name of the government's decision to accept the recommendations of the Mandal commission, and in protest of that decision, the sacrifices of innocent and gullible youth. Then came, in the name of Rama, an intolerant insistence that a judgement must be heard and implemented forthwith on a dispute hanging fire for centuries. Any excuse is enough. The gangsters, who are only waiting for any such opportunity to loot and plunder and with their support the pseudo leaders of the people, are the only people benefiting from these divisive issues.

Actually the principal tenets of all religions are one and the same. All the learned tell us that the caste distinctions signified only the professions they undertook and that there was no inherited right to the castes. No one can turn the clock back and block the changes occurring in a society. Granted that a change is necessary, don't you agree that any creed that preaches intolerance and advocates use of force for an acceleration of that change, is foolish? Peace is the first requisite to our progress. That heritage of ours which gave shelter and succor to several religions and peoples of several creeds alone can save us and lead us to glory.

Democracy is still a new tool for us. Its foundations are yet to set. A recognition must dawn that democracy is not a dictatorship of brute majority but a way of life to protect and respect the sentiments of a minority. When will such wisdom dawn on us?



## ***PELLI CHOOPULU***

### ***(WEDDING INTERVIEWS)***

"I believe they are coming this evening for Summee's "*PELLI CHOOPULU*". Bala wants us also to be there."

When my wife came in all smiles with the above observation, I ventured to opine that we had no business poking our noses in their internal and private affair like our Telugu "*panakamlo pudaka* or literally, a stick in the juice" saying.

"What is the matter with you? When they called us on the belief that you have retired from a high position and are experienced in making suitable conversation on such occasions, why do you say we would be an unwanted nuisance there?"

My ego tickled, I agreed, but that set me thinking. I do not know what your views are about this business of "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" but to me it is no better than either the method of the past with our elders on their own deciding the marriages or the pair falling in love and opting to be united as in the western civilisations; in fact it is the worst alternative. It would have been some consolation if after the "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" the issue would be decided and settled. Thereafter follows the haggling for dowry and the gifts

to be given to the bridegroom and his party like the bargaining at the vegetable market. The vegetable market is better these days. There is no selection or bargaining and it is a better- take-it-or-leave-it affair.

You may turn down my view as old time stuff. I tried to find out the views of the present day youth. Their ideas may perhaps be termed even more bizarre. Except for a microscopic minority, they do not feel comfortable to opt for the western method of the pair selecting for themselves. They also do not like this business of "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" where such silly questions as, "Do you sing?, How far are you educated?, Will you take up a professional career after the marriage or will you be content to stay at home and be a home maker?" etc., are asked. The girls do not like to be decked out and decorated and made to sit shyly and coyly for "*PELLI CHOOPULU*." The boys also do not like the idea of staring at a girl as if they have no business there other than that.

After the "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" ritual is over in the presence of the elders and if there were no anti-vibes in the first contact, the pair want to be given an opportunity to meet for themselves separately. They also question as to how they can decide only after an hour or two of pow-wow after that. It is true that during courting everyone puts up only their best profiles and appearances. Unless one lives together for some time certain irritating and disgusting real traits do not surface. For that matter even after living together intimately as husband and wife for over thirty years one cannot be sure of a hidden devil in the partner. When we say such things the children reply that we are uttering such opinions only to hustle them for a decision in our anxiety to finish off our obligation. They also stress that they must find out for certain the views of the

other party on some crucial issues of importance in their view. It could be, for example, the issue of the girl's career after the marriage. It is understandable that before the marriage they have some very definite views about it. If we say that it is possible that after the marriage they would be happy to agree to revise their views and it is our experience that many had indeed done so, they would be surprised as to how it could be possible. If they get a doubt that we are saying something just to make them agree and settle the affair, then whatever we say would not get into their heads at all.

The strangest "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" are those of the boys who come from America. Their parents say that their boys do not have much time and they have to complete the "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" and the actual marriage ceremony in just two weeks of the holiday their sons have. They would go hurriedly seeing every bride that is offered in two or three days and God only knows how they come to a decision. We can understand if they stop further "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" after they approve a girl. But a good majority of them go about the way we search the whole market and wonder whether this bargain or that is better before we make the final decision.

Westerners as well as our ancestors have said that marriages are made in Heaven. Yet we cannot act as foolish as the Telugu saying, "leaving a candle in the breeze and telling Him that it is His responsibility to keep it glowing." So it is inevitable that we go through these "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" formalities.

We reached about half an hour before the groom's party was scheduled to visit Bala, on that evening. I met Summee and asked how she was keeping and how her Ph.D. programme was going on.

"It is all because of my mother's insistence that this farce of "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" is going to take place today. She is not listening to my pleas to defer these "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" for now. You, at least, listen to me and tell my parents."

"Why should you presume that you will not be able to continue your Ph.D. programme even after your marriage? What the elders decide can sometimes work to our advantage."

Summee did not seem to appreciate my observation and she went inside giving me a look as if to say that I was also just like the rest of them after all. The groom's party consisting of him, his uncle and his aunt had arrived punctually to the time they had given. After the introductions I started my conversation with the uncle. When he told me that he was an agricultural scientist, I enquired if my brother Narayana Rao who was working in the Pusa Institute was known to him. Then all the curtains were down and he started saying "Of course I do."

"He was my senior by about three years. We both did our M.Sc.s from the same professor. By the time I joined for my M.Sc. Narayana Rao *garu* had left for USA for his higher studies and my work for the M.Sc. was a sequel to what he had done. Because the professor could not be bothered with every small detail, I would write to him and he was very considerate and helpful in giving me all the details I wanted from him. When he joined the Institute after he returned from the USA, we were together there as I was then doing my Ph.D."

Our conversation carried on smoothly as one between long lost friends for almost an hour. We were

blissfully ignorant of what the groom and Summee did or saw during this period. A glance into the eyes of my wife told me that she and the aunt of the groom were also deeply engrossed in their own world. We were unaware as to when the tiffin and coffee came in the mean time and when we finished them. There was some exchange of signals between the uncle and the aunt. We were all back to reality when she rose to say good-bye for the time being and that they were staying with their cousins in the same town and very soon they would let us know further.

"Our Summee is a very lucky girl. Her marriage has been fixed just like that. They were all pleased with an alliance from some one from our family."

When my wife came smiling after putting down the telephone and gave me the happy news, I could not help asking her:

"Has Summee agreed to marriage just now? Did the people from the groom's side give any assurance that she can continue her Ph.D. after the marriage?"

"You are really an innocent nitwit, my dear! In her anxiety about how the "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" would go, whether she would be found agreeable to the groom and whether the groom would be handsome, alright etc., she was as nervous as a kitten but outwardly she wanted to pose as if she was confident and rattled off some nonsense stuff about the Ph.D. and all that with you. Well, should that instant for fixing the marriage as ordained by God arrive, who on earth can stop it?"

You must agree that what my wife said in passing was a gem indeed!

## ***HABIT***

As usual I could not find my spectacles and sought my wife's assistance to locate them.

"I am getting tired of searching for your glasses every day. How can we get along with this forgetfulness? Where do you think I should start? When did you use them last?"

Racking my brain and failing to recollect when I had used them last, I told her that it did not matter and I would search for them later myself. I deposited myself into the easy chair and was feeling sorry for myself as I cannot read anything without those wretched glasses. No day goes by without my having to look for them at least ten times.

How deep this habit is rooted in the human psyche? As the Telugu saying, "*alvaatulo porapatu*" (which means mistake as a force of habit) goes, almost all these habits are leading to something bad or undesirable. We seldom hear one saying that he is habituated to something good and useful in life. Have you ever heard anyone saying helping others or doing a good turn is his habit?

Some get habituated to a thing very quickly. There are others who are strong willed and when I see

such people I get jealous of them. The learned say that it is all the work of the genes. In our country, Andhras get habituated to a thing very quickly in comparison with people of any other State. When I was a student in the engineering college at Kakinada, we used to have students from all parts of the old Madras province. About twenty five percent of us were from other than the present Andhra region: Tamils, Kannadigas and Malayalees. The habit of smoking was at least ten times more in the students hailing from Andhra than students from other linguistic regions of the province. While the habit of smoking is prevalent in almost all peoples to a lesser or greater extent, there is a special type of smoking in our Andhra which cannot be found anywhere else. It is called the "*bentu*" prevalent mostly in the peasant class and in them also more among their ladies, and it is the smoking of a cigar with the lit end in the mouth, thus enabling one to enjoy the warmth as well as the tobacco smoke. As this style of smoking is called the "*bentu*" and its users are mostly illiterates, this word "*bentu*" has now become a common usage term in Telugu for referring derisively to some one as an unintelligent and unsophisticated fellow

Apart from tobacco smoking and inhaling of snuff, even in respect of addiction to alcohol it is observed that Andhras seem to lead everybody else in our country. There is no distinction of either rich or poor, young or old in this addiction. Even though this addiction to alcohol was rampant even in olden days, the recent change in the attitude of people addicted needs a serious reflection. Earlier only the very wealthy and the very poor took to it in great numbers. The wealthy indulged in it for the kick out of it and the poor to forget their hard miserable toil to eke out their livelihoods. But this

has spread throughout the spectrum of our society including the segment which boasts of being the intelligent and the educated among the vast number of middle class families. Earlier those who took alcoholic drinks did so in secret with a helpless guilty feeling that they were committing a sin. The stalwarts of the present day, forgetting the fact that by their habit they are ruining themselves and their families, behave as if this imbibing alcohol is a must to live in style, earning respect and regard in society.

in our small town, there used to be only two shops where alcoholic drinks could be had or purchased. At one end of the town in a poor shack was the "*Toddy shop*" and at the other end was the "*Brandy shop*" in a *pucca* and comparatively comfortable place with tables and chairs. The *brandy shop* was mostly empty and we used to wonder if anyone patronised that place at all. Now there are at least twenty brandy shops patronised mostly by middle class whereas even now there is only one *toddy* shop for the poor.

In Andhra if a group of four assemble all their conversation is about what a good time they had some time earlier with drinks, at whose expense and how some one made a fool of himself by throwing it up at the party; otherwise it could be about the different brands they had and their different tastes and so on-- all about alcoholic drinks only. If someone calls his friends over for dinner, if there are no alcoholic beverages there is no conversation and the guests will mostly be in a hurry to finish their dinner and take leave of the host. They refer to it as a mere water party and declare that it was no fun at all. If there is alcohol the tongues start wagging at the party. No one seems to be in a hurry for dinner. They get up for dinner some time after



midnight, cursing for being compelled to leave the bar. God only knows what they take and eat for their dinner but at the end while taking leave of the host they mumble their thanks for the wonderful dinner and the splendid time they had.

Call them habits or addictions as you wish. When we discuss them, playing cards is perhaps the greatest of them all. It must be acknowledged that the inventor of playing cards is a genius par excellence. Every day this pastime provides entertainment and excitement to millions of people all over the world. In our childhood the two most popular games in Andhra were "*Bestulu*" and the "*Three cards*". One can say that the "*Bestulu*" game is unique and a special favorite of Andhras. I wonder if any one other than Andhras knew that game. Among the children and those who were not playing for any stakes, "*Addata*" was very popular. However, these days we see people playing only "*Rummy*" or contract bridge every where in Andhra. The game of bridge is played more for recreation and fun than for gambling. Those who play that game look down upon those who do not know the game and consider it a deficiency in their intellectual attainments. The game of "*Rummy*" is also ridiculed by them as a game which does not require any intelligence and, therefore, fit only for the ladies (definitely a male chauvinistic opinion). But one sees only "*Rummy*" at most of the clubs and get-togethers. The stakes are very high and there is no place there for people like us who want to play only for recreation. It is indeed astonishing to see those people of even poor salaries and status playing for very high stakes. What they may lose in a day may be even more than their monthly salary and one wonders how they survive with such an expensive

habit! Musing over the various ramifications of these habits, unconsciously I pulled out a cigarette from the packet in my pocket, and lighted it enjoying the first puff. I do not know from where my wife got the scent of the puff.

"That it is a bad habit and you get cancer due to it is being so extensively reported in the press and by all the learned people. You are an educated person. You give lectures for hours together on what is good and what is bad in various forums and to various people. What is the use of all those "*Sree ranga neetulu*"? (precepts preached only for others).

What else could I reply to my wife but that I am after all a full blooded Andhra!

## ***THE LANGUAGE DEBATE***

We were then living in a village near Calcutta. In that place there were no Telugu families near by. Our children used to speak, in the school and in the colony, either English or in Bengali. Only in the house they used the Telugu while speaking to their parents. We did not bother the children with learning to read and write Telugu as they were already burdened with three languages to learn in school: English, Bengali and Hindi. We felt that if they wanted to they could later easily learn the Telugu script and the language. One day when my wife was buying some cloth, my eight year old daughter was all smiles and happily shouted to her: "Mother, mother, listen they are also speaking our tongue" looking at another Telugu family in the shop. Then we realised how sweet a mother tongue sounds to a person.

Before Independence the provinces were not linked by any one language. In our Madras presidency people speaking Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam were all there in one province. It was decided from the beginning that after Independence, the country shall be divided into States on a linguistic basis as far as possible and that the affairs of each State will be conducted in the local or majority language of the States. Similarly, it was also the dream of our

forefathers that the government would be decentralised to the maximum extent by the evolution and development of powerful and economically as well as politically independent "*Panchayithis*", municipalities, corporations and "*Zilla parishads*". It was also decided that Hindi would work as the link language of the States and with the blessings of the elders the propagation of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking areas started in earnest through the various Hindi *Prachara Sabhas*.

For the various ills that have since cropped up in free India there are several people blaming us Andhras, that all these linguistic States and language divide started with us. I have a small plea to them. They seem to forget that when the British were prepared to grant an Andhra State along with some other States they created in the thirties, Andhra leaders in their patriotic fervor rejected their conciliatory offer and loudly declared their demand for full independence first and asserted that they would have their State after that. Anything prescribed as good will yield good results only when taken in the prescribed dosages, but if taken in excess can do more harm than good. So is the case with the linguistic division of the country and the subsequent ills. It is indeed very difficult to judge which was the worst step we took, whether it was the linguistic division or the adoption of Hindi as the National language.

Take the case of Hindi. The very same leaders who tried to propagate Hindi so enthusiastically such as for example Rajagopalachari *garu* had to go against that language after witnessing the dictatorship of the Hindi zealots. A small example is sufficient to illustrate the excesses. Even though we have adopted in our constitution that we shall use only Arabic numerals, in

the Hindi speaking States it is commonly seen that they use only the Hindi numerals. As a result if any non-Hindi knowing person gets involved in a car accident in those States and if the car driver flees away from the scene, the poor fellow cannot even complain to the police with any details of the offender. The insistence on Hindi in the official correspondence in those States is only causing delays for translation of all documents into Hindi but without any significant and real adoption of Hindi by the officials. For those commonly used English terms in our day-to-day vocabulary the zealots have coined in the name of pure Hindi translations, absurd gibberish, transparent only to the *pundits*. We have to keep on referring to the special dictionaries they have prepared. After witnessing this mad haste for its implementation and the intolerance shown by them to non-Hindi people's difficulties, even those of us who fully believed that Hindi should eventually become our National Language, are becoming anti-Hindi. Whatever might be the progress they show on paper, the real fact is that propagation of Hindi in non-Hindi areas has received a significant set-back over the years instead of moving forward.

The position of the languages of the States is another sad story. We do not see any programmes for their development. How demeaning and derisive is the plight of a Telugu teacher in a school or a professor in the college? How many profound and great works are coming out annually these days in the local languages? Can we honestly say that in the present generation the knowledge of our mother tongues is any better than ours? With the decrease in the importance of English, they do not have any proficiency in it. There is no consolation either that in lieu of the English language

Telugu language has prospered. All that our people have done is to adopt in all official forms, on all buses the destination details and so on, only the local languages of the State viz. Telugu, Tamil, Kannada etc. Those of other States either as tourists or employed there on temporary basis, however learned and knowledgeable they might be, are reduced to illiterate imbeciles having to ask assistance from local people for such simple chores as taking a bus or to decipher the notice they have received from the Local or State authorities.

Hindi is not favoured as the link language. With the misplaced zeal for doing away with the foreign language the development of English is also stunted. The local languages are also languishing and falling behind. If we go on at this rate for some more time, a day will come when anyone going to another State has to go about his business only through interpreters.

You may then ask as to what we should do. Let the compulsion to force the pace of usage of Hindi stop. Let us have both English and Hindi in the school curricula. Just for the sake of adoption of Hindi let the production of the so called "*Sudh Hindi*" terms stop for the commonly used English terms. Let us encourage the widespread recognition of "*Hindusthani*" the language of the movies so popular with the non-Hindi speaking people. Our Hindi speaking brothers must have patience till the non-Hindi speaking people on their own volition ask for adoption of Hindi as the official and National Language. If there is no force that day will certainly come. As for the local languages, let any number of schemes be launched for their development without inconveniencing those out of State people living in their

State. Let us look after the scholars and poets of the local languages by State assistance and recognition. There is also no objection to raise the standard of the syllabus in the schools and the colleges but let us not force it on the children with other mother tongues.

One more plea! Almost all of our languages were derived from Sanskrit and as a result there are a lot of common words among them. Because of the different scripts we are unable to take advantage of this heritage. Why should we not have a common script? It is true that we can consider "*Devanagari*" the script of Sanskrit for it. But in this computer age why should we not think of a script which is more amenable for fast work such as the Roman script, the script in use for the English language? Until we are ready for one language, Hindi, let us use both English and Hindi but to a common script. Let us be proud of our languages but let us also forget and forsake our intolerance for other local languages or English. Don't you agree?

## ***FESTIVALS***

"Festivals are approaching. We have to get the house white-washed. We have to paint the place. The parents-in-law of our daughter have to be invited. We have to write to our son-in-law. We have to buy *dhotis* and the *sarees*. What do you want to buy for the son-in-law? My poor brother and his wife have no children and it will be nice if they can visit us and enjoy the festivals with all of us."

Thus my wife narrated the chores I have to do and the invitations I have to send out. Every year in our Andhra for the "*Sankramanam pandugulu*", in Bengal for the "*Desserah*" festival, in Tamilnadu for the "*Deepavali*" and likewise people of other States for some other festivals go topsy-turvy to get prepared for those festivals special to their areas. Like "you scratch my back and I will scratch yours", every one gives gifts to everyone else and there is money to spend everywhere. I think in all this madness only the traders are the beneficiaries. That is why for over a month in advance they start those attractive festival sales.

Apart from the enormous expenditure to the master of the house, have you noticed how much of a trouble and labour for the house-wives it is, to look after the guests from several days prior to the festival



days and till days after their end? These days one can get from the *bazaar* a number of snacks, sweets and special dishes but in our childhood, our mother and aunts had to start preparation of these specialties like, "*Appadalu, Odiyalu, Jantigalu, Muggundalu*" etc., almost a month in advance. Every afternoon they would meet by turns in someone's place or other and spend the whole afternoons in their preparation. As they were being prepared the elders would with great difficulty pacify the impatient children with a sample or two, and promising them that they could have all they wanted later during the festivals. The dishes prepared would be stashed away in attics far from the reach of the children. Sometimes they were locked in a store room heavily secured with padlocks. Everyday throughout the festival season, the housewife had to prepare some "*Pindivantalu*" or other besides the usual, if not more, dishes for a three or four course meal. All the guests had to be served with morning tiffins and coffee, sumptuous lunches, afternoon snacks and coffee and the dinners. This kept the ladies of the house occupied with preparation and serving of meals besides cleaning and washing the dishes for the good part of each day from four in the morning to ten at night. While at work during these chores the ladies used to update themselves with all the gossip. The children were pretty much left to themselves without any control from the elders. In general they had a grand time eating all the sweets and special dishes to their hearts content, playing and fighting among themselves. In between they would beg for some money from those elders busy gambling playing cards and with the monies obtained they would raid the town to buy whatever they fancied. In the evening after dinner there was an exodus to the movies of all those elders who were crazy about it and

energetic enough to brave an outing of another three hours before retiring for the day. Those who loved it dearer than their own lives, continued to gamble playing cards, almost uninterrupted during the whole wakeful period of the day except for the inevitable chores like a bath and meals. They would have their afternoon snacks and tea served there at the gambling table itself.

Because they are obliged to live far away from the home State being employed in those places and the children in those States do not have their holidays coinciding with the big festival of the home State, except for those living in Andhra, the festivities for the "*Pedda Pandugulu*", big festivals, have diminished. It is becoming very rare for all the relations to assemble and enjoy such get-togethers. We knew of a family whose eldest son worked in a far off out of State place and as a result seldom visited his folks back home. Once when he went home his youngest brother asked his mother who that uncle was.

It is a good thing for people to celebrate and enjoy festivals and festivities in their own homes. But lately a calamity has befallen, with people wanting to celebrate the festivals in a grand and blaring style, collectively in community "*puja pandals*" for which donations are forcibly extracted. For "*Srirama Navami*" and "*Ganesh Pūja*" in Andhra, "*Dasserah*" in Bengal and so on in different states for different big festivals of their own, this community celebration for almost ten days, with loud speakers blaring film songs from dawn to late at night, dances and entertainment programmes in the main *puja pandal* with a bit of *puja* for about an hour spread over three spells in the day, has become the accepted mode of celebration. As it is, our towns and

cities have become noisy with industries and all sorts of noise pollution. On top of it this additional torture from the *puja pandals* is virtually splitting our ear drums. All the songs blared through the loud speakers are full of foul-mouthed expressions, indecent and vulgar jokes. The management of the programmes in the *puja pandals* is mostly in the hands of useless vagabonds and criminals.

In addition to this practice of free licence for public nuisance during the community *pujas* which has the tacit approval of the society, we are unable to escape from similar nuisance even for strictly private affairs of family celebrations. If a marriage is to be performed a pandal right across the thoroughfare is being erected blocking the traffic for that day. They possibly believe that greater the public nuisance and inconvenience they cause, the greater is their joy of the celebrations for the occasion.

The calm and concentration required for a worship are gone. Such good thoughts or good sense that we should not inconvenience or trouble others on our account have vanished. When will this useless expenditure and nuisance end in the name of public festivals or private family affairs? Will such good days be never seen?

## ***VILLAGE AND TOWN***

Whenever I asked my wife to make a special dish that my mother used to prepare in my childhood, my wife would mock at me saying that I am after all a country bumpkin and I used to get angry all these days and I would remind her:

"Even though our place is not as big as your city of Madras, it is not a village. It is a big *"Taluka"* town. Even in those days we had a high school and two movie halls. What do you know of a village? You should go and see my aunt's village, Srirampuram."

Srirampuram had a tank for a dip whenever we wanted. In the summer there were plenty of *"Thatikayalu"* and groundnuts to relish. We used to pester our aunt to take us to her village and within two days of stay there we got satiated with what it could offer and we would get bored. We would again pester her to take us back to our home town. My wife would not be cowed down by such remarks and would shut me up with her retort,

" I have seen enough of your big town--- Pigs in the back yard, bath at the well in public view of everyone, brackish water, dirty sewage canal in front of the house, ants crawling all over and those mosquitoes!"

In those days towns in our Andhra were in a deplorable condition and they are no better even now. But in those days the villages were very clean. The whole village consisted of two streets. There were perhaps no more than fifty families living in any one village. In one street there were a few pucca houses of the landlords and the influential folks like the "*Karanam*" and the "*Munasab*". In the second street the agricultural labour and the craftsmen stayed in their huts. In the matter of cleanliness there was no difference between the two streets. With traditional rice flour decorations of "*Muggulu*" on thoroughly washed and cleaned side-walks, painted door-sills the whole village was colourful and picturesque. Every day the open yards and the floors in each room which were mud-plastered were washed and swept clean. They were so clean that there was no need for any mat to be spread to sit or squat. They had no electricity and a cool breeze used to blow most of the time as if to reassure that one did not need electric circulating fans to survive. There were no flies or mosquitoes. There were vegetable (kitchen) gardens in every house and there was nothing like a vegetable market. The meals (there were no *tiffins* or in-between snacks) prepared with hand-pounded rice, clean pulses and unadulterated oils and "*Ghee*" used to taste like nectar. Dinner was served before it got dark and one went to bed almost immediately after that. The day would start again long before the sunrise.

If one happens to visit those villages now, one wonders whether they have changed or our earlier impressions were just imagination. All the big and pucca houses are empty. There is no one to even light a lamp in those places. For the sake of the education of

their children the families have migrated to the towns. The second street of the labour class has now electricity both in the street and in the houses. They have radios and some other signs of modern conveniences but the streets are full of litter, free roaming pigs, dirty pools of water and street dogs. The population has increased enormously and they are all cramped in the same old limited place.

Village uplift has become a common catch word of all the present day public figures and the so-called people's leaders. They can give lectures for hours on poor people and the plight of the agricultural labour. Recently another fad has come up. It is their assertion on every occasion that the government should spend more money in villages and schemes for their development than on improvements to towns and cities. But if there is nothing to show for whatever amounts that were earlier spent on villages and their development, what is the reason for it? How does one stop the migration of the intelligentsia from the villages? We must elect as our leaders only those who know the answers to these questions and can be expected to do something concrete about them. If we do not analyse and make sure that the past mistakes are not repeated, while in the past thousands of rupees went down the drain, this new fad will make sure that *crores* would go down instead, without an iota of improvement in the condition of our villages.

Because of mechanisation and increased productivity with scientific methods of cultivation and upkeep of crops, agriculture does not now need as many people as in the past. If we persist with old methods and practices of agriculture, it becomes an unproductive, and a less attractive business. If we set up industries in

villages then job opportunities will increase in the villages. If schools, colleges, hospitals, and recreation facilities are established in the villages, there will be no necessity at all for people to migrate from the villages to towns and cities.

You may be thinking that what I say is all imaginary. See what is happening in the foreign countries. The population of cities like New York and London is going down day by day. It is no exaggeration at all if I say that our big cities do not have such facilities as they have abroad in small towns with a population of even less than a few thousands.

It is not correct to think that only the government has to exert in establishing such facilities in the villages. All the educated, enlightened and affluent people have a duty to insist that we should not expand the rotting towns and cities any more. The amount we spend in those places should be only for maintaining what they have to a reasonable degree of efficiency and effectiveness. In this new policy, if it means that we have to spend even more than, say, ninety percent in our villages, so be it.

For establishing new facilities and for relocating the facilities from towns and cities in the villages, there should be attractive incentives in the policies of the Central and the State Governments. Infrastructure like electricity, protected water supply and hospitals should be first established in the villages. There is no use of the projects like the New Bombay in Maharashtra or Kalyani in West Bengal where facilities had been developed in villages but close to big cities and made them into satellite townships. It is also no use concentrating the new developments in a few selected

villages simply because they happen to be the native places of the members of the assembly or the parliament. As a policy we should aim to see that the population of no village is allowed to grow more than say ten thousand. A town should have no more than fifty thousand and no two towns should be closer than, say, a hundred miles. We should not create any new city of population exceeding a *lakh* by expanding the existing towns.

This revolution is not achieved by mere slogan shouting. Our determination and real changes in the policies of our governments are a must to realise the new order of villages, towns and cities. An awakening must come that it is far better to live in a village happily with dignity like human beings, than to exist like worms in the concrete jungles of towns and cities.



## **TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT**

I visited their town almost immediately after my return from an year's stay in England. My little nephew asked of a thing he saw with me if it was imported, and when I replied that it was not and that as a matter of fact I had purchased it in Visakhapatnam, his interest in it had vanished. The immediate change in his expression as if to state "Oh, then it can't be worth anything" spoke volumes of the craze of our people for foreign stuff. Can we wish away that youngster's expression as only natural for one to like anything new and that it is only natural that familiarity breeds contempt.

We have learnt in History that everyone who came to conquer us came only to plunder our riches and prosperity. Fahein's description of the then India gives a picture of not only material prosperity but also of an extraordinary culture far advanced than any he had seen elsewhere in many of his travels around the world. Can we ignore it as a hyperbole the poet's query to the spider "if the fantastically skilled *mulmul* weavers of Decca were its tutors. "When the industrial revolution was developing in the west we were down and ignorant of it due to the bonds of slavery that were strangling us. When I indulge in such thoughts and wonder aloud to my wife as to how the scenario had changed in just two

centuries, she would pull me down by her pertinent remarks,

"What is the use of these boasts like --Our grandfathers were so rich that they could afford everything being cooked only in *ghee* and if you doubt you may smell our mouths?-- When we ask our people to make safety pins they make them so sharp that they can be used to take samples for blood tests. When we want sharp needles for stitching they make them so blunt that they are useless for that task. The diapers they make for the babies get disintegrated after they get soaked with whatever they are supposed to absorb but remain intact."

We have to accept the truth of what she says and bow our heads down in shame. It is agreed that we were in hibernation for sometime due to bondage. It is fifty years since we gained our independence and if someone asks as to why we are still ignorant and incapacitated, it is not easy to answer that query.

If one does not know, there is no shame in asking someone who knows and learning from him. In this world nothing is obtained for nothing. My wife does not know the recipe for preparation of "*Obbatlu*" and she can learn that from the old lady, our neighbour. But for that she has to tolerate her daily visits and gossip for two hours each time. Similarly for obtaining a technology, we have to pay for the nitty gritty details of what is termed the know-how from those who can give it. There is nothing wrong in that. Yet should we forever import the technologies for every new thing we want to make? There are so many universities, industries and research institutions in our country and what are they doing? This question must be seriously pondered over by us.

Take for example a much smaller country like Japan. They do not have most of the raw materials needed by the industry. They have to import them from other countries. They were defeated and their country was in shambles at the end of the second world war. In our younger days we used to have some shops where everything in that shop was sold for a mere two "*Kanlu*". Nothing purchased there would work for even ten minutes, though outwardly they looked very much like the quality stuff in other shops and sold for much higher prices. They were derisively called "*Japanee saruku*", the stuff made in Japan. See what Japan has achieved in these intervening forty odd years. Japan leads everyone in the manufacture of transistor radios, TVs, cameras, cars etc., almost anything and everything under the sun. People buy their things not because they are cheap but because their quality is good. Even the developed nations like USA and others in Western Europe, are scared of the competition from Japan. Yet Japan is a net importer of technology in that what they pay others every year for the know-how is more than what they get from others for their know-how. Look at the Nobel prizes awarded every year. There are very few Japanese winners and almost all are from the West. Yet in industrial application Japanese have an edge over the West. How come?

The expertise of the Japanese is in detailed study of the imported technology to understand not only its strengths but also its shortcomings and thereby develop on what has been imported and with their own efforts manufacture them efficiently and at attractive costs. In Japan nobody need supervise a worker once he is told what and how to do. There is no question of the worker taking short-cuts and somehow finishing his

task. In their country the work of the managers in the factories and other establishments is not policing style supervision of those working under them. It is to guide and help in resolving any doubts or unexpected problems arising during the course of the work of the subordinates. In that country elders are respected. There the elders do not brush aside the youngsters as immature and irrelevant; instead they listen to their suggestions and give full support for pursuing their ideas. We have a lot to learn from not only their technologies but more importantly their management of a technology. Our elders must first learn this. There has to be a change in the heart and style of working of our elders in the universities, industry as well as in research establishments. As long as the effort and the aims are in the right direction, the youngsters should be left to pursue their own course and if there are errors they should be accepted and the youngsters encouraged to carry on nevertheless. There is no doubt that we have an intelligent crop of youth but there is a dearth of elders who can channel them to right courses, lend that helping hand and guide them. How can we expect better days for our country unless these elders change first?

## ***ELECTIONS***

When my aunt lamented "Alas, is it true that Indiramma has lost?", I was astonished. My aunt was about seventy five years old and she was an illiterate never having gone to any school. She got married at the age of eight like everyone else of her generation. Before she completed her twentieth birth day she got widowed. A son, my cousin Chiranjeevi, was born on the thirteenth day after his father passed away. After that she spent all her life with the sole ambition of seeing her son growing up and his family prospering. Now her whole life revolves around her grandchildren. I asked her,

" Why do you love Indiramma so much? What do you know about her?"

" Even though she is widowed, look at how and with what courage she has come up in her life?"

I had to concede that she had a good point. I asked her,

" Yes, you like her very much. Did you vote for her party?"

" I do not know. Our people were all voting for the symbol of flower and I also did the same."

My poor aunt did not know that the symbol of the party of Indiramma was different and it also did not strike her to ask for the symbol of the party her favorite Indiramma was leading. Why pity my illiterate aunt? Ask any of the so-called educated and enlightened people like you or me, as to whom they had voted and why. A variety of reasons will come out but in none of them we discern any value being attached to their vote.

One may say that he belonged to a particular party and so he voted for the candidate put up by his party. Suppose you ask him,

"What are the credentials of your candidate? How much experience has he got in public service? It does not matter if you do not know that. At least do you know what he intends to do for his constituents if he gets elected? You say you like the party. What is the stand on such and such important and burning issue facing us and what are the specific measures they have in mind for its redress?"

One need not be surprised if the reply is somewhat on these lines,

"You seem to be a useless fellow. You seem to be a nit-wit without any common sense. For such an ignoramus who does not know about our party, there is no use explaining anything."

Another may say that he belongs to a particular caste or creed and unless all from his clan support a particular candidate from the same clan, there is no future to their caste or creed. Having discovered the prevalence of this sentiment and estimating the majority of the caste or creed in a constituency, every party is setting up candidates from the same majority caste or creed.

Before independence they used to boast that congress party could win even with a lamp post as their candidate. They could say like that because everyone strongly believed that any person of the congress party was a freedom fighter and a selfless worker. As long as that generation was alive they used to set up one of them as a candidate recognising his contribution during the freedom struggle. Those stalwarts of probity and goodness are gone. A number of parties have cropped up. No standards of abilities, qualities of head and heart or contribution to public good for election of a leader are set in the minds of the people. Just as goondas take advantage of any quarrel or unrest to loot and plunder, in the present infant stage of our democracy, only goondas seem to join in the election fray and they are also getting elected by the people.

Is it then all uncertainty and depressing about our elections? Are there no encouraging signs at all? Is there no hope for this infant democracy to mature and grow into a respectable and responsible entity? If one examines carefully, there are definite indications that all is not lost and there is no need to panic and despair.

Some pessimists opine that there can be no real progress and desired results from the elections unless the voter is educated at least to a certain level and likewise some qualification of a minimum diploma or degree is insisted for a candidate seeking election. Let us examine this hypothesis. Are we not seeing many degree or diploma holders without even an iota of culture and common sense? Do we not see in several illiterate thumb impression types, abundant culture and good sense? Even though they are not well versed in the intrigues and the cliques of politicking, when they were convinced that a change must be brought about for our

salvation or when they were agitated about any injustice being perpetrated, these very same illiterates and thumb impression types of our people have demonstrated the might of their precious vote against those power-drunk and -- can buy any one with money-- cock- sure big-wigs. Three elections come to our mind in this connection.

Those were the days of our agitation for our Andhra State. The first general elections in free India were announced. The Andhras defeated at the hustings, big stalwarts who never knew any defeat in their lives and demonstrated their anger at the rejection of their demand for a separate Andhra State. As soon as they got the chance they pulled down the government which declared the emergency and destroyed all democratic institutions and made them own up that they erred in their judgement. These thumb impression types defeated the regime that came to power with a mighty sympathetic vote when there arose a suspicion that the regime was harbouring looters of public money.

There is no progress as expected. Politics has turned out to be a coterie clique. Only selfish people are becoming people's leaders. Senseless people are progressing. The numbers going down economically are rising. But the reason for this is not the argument that elections are a farce or a that vote exists for the illiterate. When there is injustice and inappropriate conduct, people like you and me, who consider themselves as intelligent and responsible are remaining silent spectators, not wanting to get involved. We and our acquiescence are the main culprits for this situation. In democracy the upper hand is that of the opposition. Today we are in power but tomorrow the tables might turn. Those in opposition now may come to power and



make the culprits, among the ruling, to account for their misdeeds. Such a fear must come. Then people of every party have to govern with probity and good sense.

Our people have demonstrated at every crucial turn that a single party rule shall not prevail for ever. This truth alone gives us a hope that better days will prevail.

## ***MOKKUBADI***

When my mother-in-law asked me if there were any vows in our family because my daughter was born with matted locks, I shrugged off saying that in our family babies were dime a dozen and there could not have been any vows attached to the birth of my daughter. But a reply came to the letter she wrote to my mother and it appears that my mother had a vow that every first born to her children would be named after the sun God and the first shave of their locks of hair would be performed in the Sun temple at Arasavilli. To my knowledge all my mother's vows were to God *Vinayaka* and she had to evoke such vows more on my account.

My mother took a vow to offer choicest dishes to God *Vinayaka* if I succeeded to get through my class eleven(secondary school leaving certificate, SSLC) examinations. As my elder brothers always did well in studies, a failure in examinations was an unheard of thing in our house. I used to roam around with the RSS activities and never studied at home. For the first time in her life she must have feared that there is going to be a failure in our house and she felt that God *Vinayaka* alone can help to avert such a catastrophe. Likewise she had to invoke *Vinayaka's* blessings for my marriage. All my brothers and sisters got married quite early

according to the custom in those days but there was some delay on account of my postgraduate studies. There is also the fact that I belong to a new generation. It took some time for the elders to agree to my stipulations and it took another two years for the right girl to appear to settle the issue. With my brothers the business got settled quickly with almost the first proposals my parents considered. When nothing was clicking in my case though I had crossed twenty four, *Vinayaka* suddenly dawned on my mother's thoughts. If my marriage is settled and God willing, if it is with a family from our own community and clan, she vowed that she would make the choicest dishes *Vinayaka* liked and offer them to him. Whether it is the grace of *Vinayaka* as my mother vowed or it was just a coincidence, my marriage got settled very soon after my mother took the vow.

All my mother's vows were those which could be fulfilled very easily. More over on the excuse of a vow, we had the special dishes to enjoy. But not all the vows people take are that easy to fulfill. Just as the elephant king prayed to Lord *Vishnu* when, despite fighting with all his strength he was unable to shake off the stranglehold of the crocodile, people invoke Him and take very difficult vows when they are in great difficulties. Some, though very rich, vow that they would visit Him, Lord *Venkateswara*, on top of the seven hills, surviving on the way by begging alms and living only on what the alms could fetch each day of the journey. Some others vow that they would observe complete fast on a specific day of each week for the rest of their lives. Yet others vow that they would visit Him on top of the seven hills and have His "*Darshan*", rolling on the road all along the way.

When a person takes a vow, fear is more apparent than faith or devotion, "*Bhakti*" as we say. When in danger, the bigger the danger they are in, the tougher is the vow they take. Except for a very few conscientious people, what we see among most is the tendency to postpone the fulfilment of a vow once the danger has passed. The tougher the vow they took, the more they delay in its fulfillment. There is also the general tendency to reinterpret the vow taken. If one pledged that he would offer a gold chain to the Lord, he would later argue with himself that while he did talk of a gold chain, he did not specify the weight and the purity of gold in the chain. He will finally close the bargain with the Lord by offering Him a thin and flimsy chain of a few ounces and of fourteen carat gold. This type of offering to the Lord is called "*Mokkubadi*" and in our language it has come to stay for any business, performed to somehow get it over with, without putting heart and soul in it.

Have you noticed the type of bananas sold near a temple in our place? Most of them on sale there are those considered very inferior, cheap and unsuitable for human consumption. It means they are all "*Mokkubadi*" fruits. After they are offered and the priest returns them as the "*Prasad*", a majority of us throw them away to the cattle or the beggars on the street, and gioat over the good deed they have performed in that act.

Excepting the very few atheists, a majority of us believe in God. In these theists the devotees or "*Bhaktulu*" are very few. Most of them are those who are afraid of God. We see quite a number who perform "*Puja*" or worship every day. We do not know what they contemplate throughout the time they are in "*Puja*" but afterwards from that moment to the time

they again sit for the puja the next day, all their thoughts and deeds are for selfish ends only. They put on those special signs, the "*Namalu*" or cross lines of "*Vibhuti*" just to announce to everyone that they had performed the puja and by implication, they are saintly souls. A vast majority of them are only "*Mokkubadidarl*" i.e. those who perform the *puja* for completing their account with the Lord and they are by no means any devotees or "*Bhaktulu*".

This "*Mokkubadi*" has established itself very well in our country. A majority among us are those who perform every task they do, just to somehow have it done with and over. This is very much evident in all our offices and the factories. They do only that much work that is considered acceptable and any less would have attracted a reprimand or a punishment. That is why we see everywhere a gulf of difference between what they say they will do and what they actually do. They say or do something only to get it over with for that moment. A number of foreigners particularly from the developed world initially believe everything our people say and are later surprised when they discover that we did not mean the promises made earlier. The fact of the matter is that our country is not likely to see better days until we get rid of this business of "*Mokkubadi*".

## ***FRIENDSHIP***

When we went to our hometown on vacation, the postman gave me the mail after accosting me "Hey, *Buchi*" very endearingly by my pet name. My ten year old daughter was very much surprised at this. In our place she was used to see the postman as a person of a different rank and social status who would only salute me respectfully and not behave as an equal. Satyam was my classmate and after fifth or sixth class dropped out to work for a living. Initially he was employed as an unskilled labour and after he attained the age of eighteen he got into the postal department as a peon. He became a postman in due course, ultimately retiring from the same position. We used to meet only when I went to our home town on vacation, may be once or twice every year or so. After the initial questioning of the welfare of our respective families, we had nothing else in common to converse. But whenever we met we were glad to see each other and I could see in Satyam's eyes affection and consideration beyond compare for me.

Though we have read of the story of Lord Krishna and his childhood friend Kuchela, it is difficult to imagine that bond and affection between childhood friends until someone experiences it for himself. All of us move and have social intercourse with people of our

own status and background. When our status changes our circle of social contact also changes. In youth we get acquainted with a number of people. We meet them frequently, mingle with them and spend a lot of time with them considering them to be close to us. As a student with co-students, as working people with co-workers, as elderly retirees with fellow retirees etc., we mix and spend time together. We are only acquaintances with most of them. In life we have only a very few with whom we are close as friends.

It is strange that with some we get along and the conversation starts flowing smoothly as if we were continuing our talks interrupted only the other day, even though it may be some thirty odd years since we met last. With some others under similar circumstances, even though we were very close and intimate earlier, we get to wonder if it was at all true that we were close at some time in the past. With such people the joy of meeting again after so long vanishes quickly and we have to understand that they are not our friends.

Kistappa is a near relation, a cousin, but I consider him more as a friend than a relative. We were both born in the same town, Bobbili, and he is three years senior to me. Yet we met for the first time only when I went to Visakhapatnam for my college education. He had finished his intermediate in our college and moved on for his graduate studies in the Andhra University situated in the same place but a couple of miles away. Even though Kistappa left our college hostel two years earlier, some of his classmates who were still in our hostel pursuing their undergraduate courses in our college, used to tell stories of his mischief and childish pranks in the hostel. I was curious and anxious to meet this cousin and in a few

days of my joining the college it did materialise. I went to see him for an hour or so but in his inimitable way he insisted and forced me to spend the whole weekend there with him in the university hostels. He seemed to be acquainted with almost everyone in the university hostels. He must have then introduced me as his dear cousin to at least a hundred people. The two days with him flew by as just two minutes. After that in the two years I studied in Visakhapatnam we became very close friends.

Kistappa did his Masters in the Andhra University and later worked there as a lecturer for a couple of years before leaving the country for USA to do his Ph.D. We met again only after about twenty five years. I went to USA to visit my daughter who was doing her P.hD. and my three brothers who are settled there when I learnt that Kistappa had a stroke a few days earlier. It may be the normal environment or mode of life in that country. Kistappa who settled down there after his Ph.D married twice but was living alone for quite some time past. After the stroke his only daughter who was living close by moved in and was looking after him. I was not sure whether he could talk when I rang him up. He himself picked up the telephone and spoke with great difficulty and exertion, not having fully recovered yet. He tried to tell me that he was alright and expressed a desire that I should visit him along with my wife. That affection he had shown in those few words could not have been described eloquently even in an epic love story.

In the great classic "*Pancha Tantra*", the first piece was the "*Mitra Labham* ", which translated means the advantage of friendship. The great sage described in that work for the benefit of his student princes, who true



friends were, how friends and gaining of friends was important as a useful instruction in the art of ruling a kingdom. It may not be appropriate to evaluate a gain or a loss in friendship. The experience of friendship is not amenable for any precise description. Friendship desires nothing. It may perhaps be likened to an endless voyage on high seas of love.

## ***FATHERS DAY***

It is said that every dog has his day! It means that in every one's life there is at least one day when he can look back on it as a day special to him. Most common special days of a person we hear are the birthday, marriage day and the day of death. The days of birth and death exist for everyone. In our tradition there used to be mostly only one marriage day. In western societies and now even in our society specially with the movie stars or very affluent people, if there are half a dozen marriages, which marriage day can they consider as special to them? If a husband forgets to remember the marriage day, the wife gets upset, angry and laments that the husband had forgotten her and love had vanished. She will not let him forget his lapse till he commits the same mistake next year again!

A lot of people celebrate their birthday with fanfare and enthusiasm. In our movies, songs and dances are a must. Whether they are relevant to the story or not, birthdays are created and a song or dance sequence is introduced to celebrate them and thus the film makers fulfill their obligation to the movie-hungry public. These days we also see parties to celebrate the birthday of even elderly grandfather types, when the guests sing "happy birthday to you", the old man enjoying it all. But in daily life we see excitement,

enthusiasm and expectation only in respect of the birthday parties arranged for the children. In our childhood we never knew of any birthday party for any of us in our house. As our people used to go by the "*Thithi*" and month of a lunar calendar in reckoning the birth day, every year the birthday never fell on a regular date as in the Gregorian calendar in use now. My mother was conversant only with our traditional reckoning and very often she would forget our birthday (nothing special was to be done that day, in any case.) "Buchi, I forgot, day before yesterday was your birth day", she would often remark. When she remembered the birthday, even though we used to cry, begging her not to, she would give us an oil bath and at the end of it throw water over our head in a clockwise motion chanting "*Srirama Raksha*", may Lord Rama protect you. If she could manage, sometimes she would make a dish I liked best to please me. With a large family to be looked after, my mother had never any free time from her domestic chores from five in the morning to eight at night each day. As far as I can recollect, the only times my mother would come close and talk endearingly was when some of us was sick with fever; sometime in the afternoon, after the morning chores are over, she would come to the cot where the sick child was resting and touching his brow, whisper, "How are you my dear? Are you running temperature?", while offering a few pieces of toast with a glass of milk.

As a matter of fact, what is so great about one's birthday? Is it because of his birth every one on this earth is blessed? Is this earth rotating without any warble in its regular orbit only from the day he was born? Is this birthday celebration not a farce like everyone cheering a bridegroom even though they

know his fate once he is hooked? When I go off tangent with such observations, my wife would scold me and tell me thus,

" Nothing better than this can be expected from you. There is no rejoicing for a festival or a felicitation. If it involves spending a few *paise*, you are the miserly type to put it off by saying that there is no such custom in your family. What is the use of such miserable existence as you lead where fun and frolic is unheard off? How can you appreciate the good feeling of a birthday party, when you never in your life called over anyone even for a few drops of watery tea?"

One may agree that there may be no point in a birthday celebration of an ordinary person like me and it is good to observe anniversaries of great events and birthdays of famous people. The government is declaring a holiday on such a day. What are we doing these days on the holiday of Gandhiji's birthday? They are showing on TV all the leaders offering flowers and bowing at the cremation site of Gandhiji's mortal remains; there may be another ten minutes of prayer meeting shown with chantings of "*Bhajans*", devotional songs. If there is some write up in one corner somewhere in the newspaper about Gandhiji, it is indeed a rarity these days. On that day even in the editorials, which are written in a beautiful language with an objective to instruct and enlighten the public, one rarely finds any bit about Gandhiji. All that we hear these days is how some one has enjoyed a movie or a game on that day. If one is addicted to alcoholic drinks and if the stock at home is exhausted, all that we hear from him on that day is that he is unable to buy the stuff needed so badly because of the government's foolish law forbidding their sale on that wretched day.

Nothing much is done these days for an ordinary people like me for the anniversary of his death but in my childhood, in our orthodox families, they used to take a lot of trouble to celebrate the anniversaries of the days their ancestors died, called "*Thaddinalu*". On the day of "*Thaddinam*" even before we children got up, all the verandahs, the rooms and the court yards were washed and cleaned and waking us up they would drive us away into the far off back yard. We used to have our breakfast there in the backyard near the cattle shed. After the rituals for over two hours including the feeding of three brahmins, who are supposed to be three of our ancestors coming down to earth in their bodies just for the duration of the rituals, everyone in our street was fed to a sumptuous meal at about three or four in the afternoon. First the men and the boys were fed and later the ladies and the girls. By the time everyone was fed and the whole place was again washed and cleaned it would be about six in the evening. It used to cost quite a bit to feed hundreds of relations, guests and beggars on that day with some very special dishes like "*Ariselu*" and "*Garelu*". Even though they did not have any bad habits and they were very frugal in their personal expenditure, there were many among our relations who got broke and went penniless in the end only because of the expenses they had to incur in the "*Thaddinalu*" they had to perform. Our father by nature was nervous and hasty. If a "*Thaddinam*" was to be performed, he would be nervous about it from a week prior to that day. During this period we would be glad to be out of his sight. We used to see a hint of a smile in his face again only after the ritual and the feeding of everyone was over. There was a lot of work for the ladies on that day to prepare all the dishes. Even though every one in the

street pitched in, it was still a severe grind for the lady of the house. My mother was addicted to coffee but on the "*Thaddinam*" day it was not considered right to have coffee until the end of the ritual and the feeding of the males. She would gulp down her coffee at about four in the afternoon. I do not know if it was due to the fast she had to observe till then or the exhaustion of the cooking chore, the coffee would immediately be thrown up. Now the business of "*Thaddinam*" is almost extinct. Even if some perform it, the ritual is cut down and simplified; the feeding is confined to very close relations or their own family members. I think the change is for the good because it means a reduction in unnecessary expenditure and effort.

I have seen one special thing observed in USA which we do not have in our country. It is their annual event of one Sunday in honour of mothers and another Sunday of fathers. Gifts are bought for mother or father on the respective days. If they live nearby they meet or they keep in touch by talking to them on telephone. The immigrant Indians make fun of this local custom by boasting that in their country they respect and worship their parents daily as the Gods in person on this earth. The truth is that in our country also the children are living away from their parents and that also very far away from them. The joint family system has vanished and they meet their parents only once a year or two. How many of us are regular even in correspondence with their parents? Don't you agree that it is a good practice to at least once a year please the parents with special remembrance wishes and gifts?

## ***IMMIGRANT PARENT CONCERNS***

When we visited our brother's place in USA, we were happy to learn that the following Saturday he invited Pantulu, our mother's cousin, over to my brother's place, as he happens to be living in the same town as my brother. It was at least over forty years since I saw him. As there is no particular retirement age stipulated in that country, Pantulu was still working, though past sixty, and hence we could meet him only on a week-end.

When Pantulu came along with his wife, I naturally could not recognise her till she was introduced because I never met her earlier. But looking at Pantulu I did wonder whether that was indeed him! There was a lot of change in him since the time we last met. As I was talking to Pantulu, I could not help over-hearing a little of his wife telling my wife something about the marriage of their daughter. Trying to pick up a conversation with her I asked her, of the "*Gotram*", a sort of sect classification of the ancestry, of their son-in-law. Her face turned red. I believe their daughter married an African American much against the wishes of her parents. I did not hear that part of her narration to my wife. Whispering that information, my wife gave me her -- why- can't-you-keep-your-trap-shut---look. I could not help uttering a remark in consolation that we

could ask for nothing better so long as the couple were happy. Pantulu's wife really got angry and scolded me with an observation that I cannot understand her feelings until a similar fate befell me.

In my childhood among our families all the marriages were arranged by the parents only. Apart from caste, if there happened to be sub-castes in a caste, marriages were fixed only if the sub-castes were also the same. In the sub-caste also if "*Gotram*" (a sort of genealogical distinction) happened to be the same, such an alliance was not considered because marriages among families of the same "*Gotram*" were prohibited. Alliances were sought only with families from towns not far off. It should be possible for the girl to reach her parents in about two or three hours by a bus or bullock cart without having to change the mode of transport anywhere in between. My sister was married into a family about eighty miles from our home town. Our people used to despair of that journey involving bus, train and boat rides. In summer, when Godavari river was not full, the journey involved in addition walking in the sandy portions in the hot sun. After crossing Godavari a ride in "*Jutka*" might also be in store if one failed to get seats in a bus. Things have since changed. Now we are told that the likes and dislikes of the children should be ascertained before fixing the marriages. If the children settle their marriage on their own, the parents are accepting it if the caste is the same though the sub-castes are different. If they happen to live out of State places or in a different country, the parents are willing to reconcile to the fact if the children marry someone from the same State; if that is not to be they are prepared to accept if the alliance is with someone of their own country.



An alliance between two different religions is still not acceptable to most parents. Particularly an alliance between Hindu and Muslim families is negatived with vehemence. If a girl is to marry a Muslim the family of the boy usually insist that the girl should convert to Islam before the marriage ceremony is to be performed.

All that the parents seek is only the happiness of the children. With the system of joint family gone, there are no hopes that the daughter-in-law would in time look after the household and the welfare of the in-laws. In old age also the parents are living separate from their children and they are happy if the children live close by. Whether the children marry someone of their choice or not, the parents are not expecting any personal or economic assistance from them. The parents believe that marriage is a life long association and they also know that an accommodation and adjustment is inevitable in any married life. If the backgrounds of the families are not alike they fear that the differences in the psychologies of a couple may lead to a break up of the marriage. The youth brush aside such views of their parents as outdated and irrelevant in the society in which they have to live. If they are in their dream world of love,(it is not for nothing that it is said that love is blind), even those wards who are by nature very intelligent and perceptive behave as if they have taken leave of their senses and stick to their own opinions and believe that anyone who says to the contrary are imbeciles and idiots.

There are many who have migrated to foreign lands and in particular to the United States of America. When the children are growing up, the parents encourage their wards to mix and mingle freely with the

native Americans and to try to be equal to them in all their attainments and aspirations. When they grow up a little, their trials and tribulations start. In the USA It is very common for students to quit their education after high school graduation and to start living on their own pursuing some vocation or other. Considering their own backgrounds the parents want their wards to pursue higher college education and to take up professional careers in a university or industry just like them. The children's application and attitudes to education becomes the first worry. Now it is prevalent everywhere, though to a greater degree in the USA, this addiction to something more serious and far worse than the opium viz., drugs at a relatively young age of school going age. Then comes the issue of sex before marriage at quite an early age. In their tradition a man and a woman have to first date and enjoy the company of each other not once but over a period of time and then come to a decision to cement their friendship by a wedding. If dating with one does not prove to be worth repeating then follows another attempt and yet another till a life partner is mutually discovered. There in the USA our people's biggest worries are, drugs and the dating.

The children get puzzled to observe that the very same parents who gave them freedom and encouragement to be like the rest of the Americans suddenly start putting restrictions and objections. They can understand the concern of the parents about drugs and their harmful effects to health and life. They cannot appreciate their objection to dating. They plead that as adults they know their tradition and they can take care to avoid any transgression. They plead that unless they act normal like the rest of the American

kids and date they get isolated in the student community and they beg their parents to let them live their lives like the rest of the boys and girls of their company.

Once the issues of drugs and dating are put behind, the worry of the parents starts with the issue of the marriage of their wards who may be nicely pursuing postgraduate studies. In particular the question of marriage of a girl becomes a thorny issue of a great divide between the parents and the child. The children believe that an alliance with someone like them born and raised in the USA alone will work. If we argue that such a fixed opinion may not be right and one should not outright reject an alliance with some one born in India, it is not well received. If we point out that someone born in India and pursuing postgraduate studies there in USA may mean best of both, the girls in particular reject it saying that such boys are not smart. For us it is difficult to understand their view-point. What is the smartness they are talking about? Is it that their accent is not like the boys raised there? If we say that it is so easy to pick up an accent but not culture or upbringing, they brush it aside saying, "It is not that. We cannot explain to you".

What we see in the end is that the questions, issues and difficulties may be different in the two countries but our children, in India or in the USA, are the same. They no longer implicitly obey what the parents command but they do observe and recognise the tradition that the parents set through their own conduct. Practices and not preachings find their echo. Because of many changes over the generations there are bound to be differences in the aspirations of the parents and their children. The children move in a different society and environment from that of their parents. They do,

however, have the capacity to see the good and bad in what they see and respond with rectitude and responsibility to the culture that the parents have passed on to them. We cannot outright brush aside their concerns and views. Our duty lies only in explaining to them the adjustments and accommodation needed in life, what and why we consider certain things as good or bad. After that what we can wish for is only their welfare. Even if by mischance they make a mistake and suffer as a consequence, our duty as elders is only to give them the protection and the confidence that all is not lost yet and to bless them for a bright future ahead.

## THANDANA THANA

All children are fond of stories. They pester the elders for telling a story. Even the elders are keen to listen to anyone who can, with his imagination and skill in narration, tell an interesting story. In our childhood whenever anyone visited us the first question from us children was whether they knew any stories to tell us. After that from early morning we used to pester them to tell us a story. They used to put it off saying that let lunch be over. Then they used to ask us to wait till they have had their siesta. At last after all of our play was over and it was evening their story telling used to start. We heard a number of stories from Bhagavatam, Bharatam and Ramayana from our Avataram Mamayya, (uncle Avataram) and stories from "*Kasimajileelu*" and "*Mughalai Darbar*" from our aunt Chinnammai. Later we read any number of short stories of several authors from different countries. But when my grandchildren ask me for a bed time story I can readily recall only the "*Kothi Gunde Kaya*" (the heart of the monkey) and the "*Pillarikayalu*" (a variety of cookie made from rice flour) stories I heard in my childhood. My grandchildren wonder if I know any other stories at all.

When our aunt's son Narayana came to our home town for admission into our high school, he was

more proficient in arithmetic than I, three years senior to him. He was very adept in mental arithmetic. He could not only rattle off multiplication tables up to twenty twenties but he was clever to know multiples of quarters and three quarters of integers up to twenty. But we were all stunned more at his prowess in brain tweezers or "*Podupu Kathalu*". He would narrate each of them in a sing-song fashion and ask us what it meant. We used to rack our brains to no purpose. The moment he gave us the clue we were surprised that such an easy solution escaped our intelligence. The story telling was developed into an art in Andhra in the form of "*Harikatha*", the narration of the tales of the Lord from the epics like the "*Bhagavatam*", "*Bharatam*" and "*Ramayana*" by the narrator called the "*Haridasu*", the servant of Lord *Hari*. With lustrous ornaments in his ears, tinkling bells tied to his feet and castanets in his hands, the artist, Haridasu was a spectacular sight and the spectators were spellbound by his person as well as his narration. Whatever be the story selected, the narration called the "*Katha Kalakshepam*" used to take at least three hours. His narration included music, song and dance to dramatise the narration taking his audience into rapture. I did not have the good fortune of witnessing his great performances but I have heard of the great and famous Adibhatla Narayanadasu *garu* who by his exquisite exposition of the art earned encomiums not only in Andhra but throughout South India. Through self tuition that great man had acquired high proficiency in South Indian classical music, dance and he mastered a number of languages including Persian. An epithet of God's gifted person can be appropriate for such a person only. In our childhood

almost every Haridas was proud to declare that he was a disciple of the great Narayanadas.

While I was still a boy the art of Harikatha started to decline with a dearth of patrons for fine arts. As I crossed the teens the most popular variety of story narration in Andhra was the "*Burra Katha*". With ordinary usage language, folk music, narration in a racy and dramatic style, the *burra katha* was easily understood by the illiterate masses as well. In addition it had a tremendous capacity to arouse the feelings of the listeners. I do not think there is any other comparable folk art either in Andhra or anywhere else in our country which can generate such sense of participation, interest and enthusiasm among its audience. When the audience heard a *burrakatha* of Alluri Seetharama Raju, every one in the audience gushed with patriotism and valour. With the rendition of "*Puthadi Bomma Purnamma*" the audience wept uncontrollably throughout the narration.

The greatest titillating thing in *burra katha* is the oft repeated phrase, "*Uthapadam*" the "*Thandana Thana*". The narrator wants to rivet the attention of the listeners and for this he utters this phrase "*thandana thana*" a thousand and odd times in between the narration and his side-kick repeats it each time. Gradually this has come to stay in the vocabulary with a different shade of meaning. When someone in power to dispense favours utters a remark, he does usually have a few following him who repeat it and propagate the myth of the greatness of that person who started it all. Such repetition and aping to flatter is called a "*Thandana Thana*". If one leader utters or starts a thing, we see that his side-kicks and pseudo junior leaders repeat or follow it *ad nauseam*. A phrase like

"emotional integration" of Nehru and "*Deshki Akhandata aur Ikyeta*" of Indira Gandhi, have been repeated countless times by all and sundry at every function, for years after they were unfortunately coined by the peers.

This trait of "*Thandana Thana*" may be considered as a significant one among the many causes for our backwardness despite the fact that in our country we are endowed with an abundance of natural resources and talent. If there is one genius among us, there is no chance for anyone else working with him to emulate him and achieve any greatness because he does not tolerate any of his underlings to have their own independent ideas or feelings. He lets only those who do the "*Thandana Thana*" to be any where near him. Similarly if one profited by some method everyone else wants to profit using the same method. For example, if one set up a pharmacy and made money, we see very soon a dozen pharmacies springing up in the neighborhood whether there is such a demand or not; no doubt most of such people do not stand to gain. If a Minister propounds a scheme with some ulterior motives of hoodwinking the public, the Civil Administrators, whose duty is to examine the scheme in depth and explain to the Minister the deficiencies and disadvantages in its implementation, are mostly doing "*Thandana Thana*" and praising it to high skies. How can we progress if everyone is doing this "*Thandana Thana*?"



## *INHERITANCE*

When my father was thrashing me for my refusing to go to school, my grandmother would intervene and ask her son not to strike me and what she said then, "even if the boy does not go to school and remains illiterate, he can manage to survive with whatever the crop yields and in those years when the crops fail, with what is stored" tells simply and effectively the strength of the inheritance.

History tells us that mankind did not have this inheritance from the beginning. Only that person who was strong and skilled to protect his people became their king. So is the case with the four castes. It was recognised that those who lived simply without any thought of accumulating riches, were learned and had only the welfare of mankind in their thoughts and prayers to God, were the brahmins. Similarly those who took up trade and commerce were the Vaisyas, the people who toiled with their hands and muscles for a living were the Sudras and those who took up arms for protection of their fellowmen were the Kshatriyas. When human societies grew up from small clans each wary of the other into big nations bringing in peace and prosperity to its people, some where along, this inheritance must have sneaked in.

It is said that the son of a pundit will in all probability be a dunce. Before this inheritance raised its head, the pundit must have wondered how his nitwit son would survive but now he has nothing to worry on that score if he can make a pile and leave it to him. These days, if fate had made one a political leader, his progeny for the next four generations are becoming political leaders irrespective of their abilities or aptitudes. If one comments on it as a strange phenomenon, someone may point out that it is not peculiar to us only and it can be seen in foreign countries also. He may point out the examples of Roosevelts in USA and the Churchills in England. He is forgetting one essential difference. While in those countries, a person, however big his ancestors might be works his way up to the top by hard work and ultimately becomes big on his own right, here in our country we see, these days, someone suddenly appearing from nowhere and pushing himself as a leader because of his ancestry. This inheritance has become a common thing not only in politics but also in the movie world. For that matter, as if to stress that there is no real difference between the two fields, we find many leading movie stars becoming leading politicians.

Does a man accumulate and save by all that hard work and by sweat of his brow as the saying goes, for his own enjoyment? In his efforts to get rich, his youth and strength are gone and then he is old, unable and incapable to utilise what he had accumulated with indigestion, aches and allergies for everything considered good to enjoy. If man, knowing full well that man is mortal and he cannot after death take even a blade of grass with him, is immersed throughout his life

in activities to acquire riches, it is clear that he does so with the faith that his progeny, however incompetent they may turn out to be, can live in comfort on their inheritance.

It is a sad thing that there are millions in our country who unfortunately do not have a shelter, adequate food or decent clothing. It is not that they are all unintelligent and dull. Their only fault is that they are born into poor families. Prior to independence it was believed that the cause for poverty was the subjugation under foreign yoke and our elders used to dream of the times after our independence when all would be equal to avail the opportunities and by their own efforts people would get strong physically, mentally and morally. Though it is five decades since we got independence, our forefather's dreams have remained as dreams only. All the available opportunities are being grabbed only by the haves and day by day the have-nots are getting poorer and poorer, thanks to the influence of the inheritance.

Leaving aside our country, the economic situation in other countries is also no different. Only the affluent nations are able to plan on a long-term perspective and reap results of their plans. Even if by a quirk of fate, some unforeseen calamity overtakes people in those affluent countries, they are able to absorb the shock and move forward. People in the developing countries, unable to plan even for the morrow, rest content to survive each day. If a calamity should occur they are only helplessly suffering and going down further under its weight.

Communism, which abolished all individual property and so indirectly all inheritance, championed the cause of the downtrodden and proclaimed equality

of all of its citizens, did not prosper either. See what is happening these days in the erstwhile USSR? In this illusive world there is no peace indeed to mankind. Imagine what a great drama He is enacting by first creating a human, then giving him intelligence which is enabling him to conquer his physical world and in the end undoing it all by the simple trick of inheritance!

## ***LOAN, PRINCIPAL AND INTEREST***

Everyone who took a loan from our Gopalam *babu* (uncle Gopalam) had in the end lost every cent of what they had, like one returning to the base of the serpent in the game of snakes and ladders. Gopalam *babu* gave a loan to only those who had a good collateral in lands or other fixed assets. After he gave the loan he never troubled them to return his money. Now and then he would only have the agreement rewritten to ensure that his claim would not get time-barred. When anyone brought money for repayment he would ward them off saying that it was not an auspicious day for such a transaction or on some other pretext he could invent. If it became impossible to put him off any further, he would count the interest up to that last date ignoring any number of intervening days he himself put him off. Gopalam *babu* did not pursue *vedic* studies like his contemporaries. Neither did he go to any of the other English medium schools because the education they provided was considered foreign and not right for orthodox brahmins of his day. He knew only how to write in Telugu and a little arithmetic learnt in his elementary Telugu medium school. But he was very adept in sums involving calculation of interest, accurate and faster than even an electronic computer. He was fond of catching hold of any high school student and

having a good laugh at the student's discomfiture in calculating a sum of interest he would give him. Our result of interest calculation will always be wrong according to the reckoning of Gopalam *babu* because he would calculate the interest for both the days, the day the loan was taken as well as the day it was repaid.

While teaching us subtraction we were told to borrow when the digit to be subtracted was bigger. I was always confused as to when I should borrow and when not to, and from where to borrow. Naturally the teacher would hit me on the head at such times remarking that nothing ever would sink in my mud head. It is because of that I think that I always dreaded taking a loan in my life. If by chance I had to borrow, I could not rest in peace till I had repaid it.

It appears that the modern world survives only on credit. A budget of almost every government shows deficit with income hundred and expenditure hundred and twenty and so on. If we as lay men wonder as to how that is possible, the learned economists tell us that a deficit budget is for our good only so long as the deficit is under control. They tell us that such a budget helps to improve our economy. Their talk smacks of black magic to common people like us. Granted that for developing countries like ours it may be necessary to borrow and work to a deficit budget, what about developed nations like, say, the USA. Their budget shows a deficit of some billions of dollars. Even if that deficit is growing year by year like one's sins over the years, the people there seem to be none the worse for it. Does this mean that the deeper a government is in deficit, the better off its people are?

It is true that everyone may need to borrow sometime or other. Precisely when a lot of guests are

waiting for coffee the sugar gets exhausted and even a very well off family may then have to send their servant maid to borrow from their neighbour however poorer the neighbour may be. But the strange thing is the practice, particularly in the developed countries like the USA, of buying on credit and hoping to clear it not on what one has with him but on what he is expecting to earn in future. The banks and the *shopwallahs* in those countries literally beg the people there to take credit cards or loans from them. The purses of those people are not stocked with currency notes but these credit cards; one for the barber shop, another for groceries and yet another for buying petrol etc. If some ignoramus like me goes with cash in his purse, he is most likely to be threatened with a dagger or a pistol poked in his ribs and deprived of all the money. This unfortunate thing termed mugging is a common occurrence in most of their big cities.

In those societies that worship consumerism which benefits the traders, a system called "Hire purchase" which is only a variation of the loan business is also in great demand. Even though the price of the car is a *lakh* or more, they are coaxed to buy it pleading that they need pay only a couple of thousands each month. There are many families which get broke there by this hire purchase intoxication that lulls them to believe that what they have to pay is only a little, well within their means and makes them buy lots and lots of things, which they discover later they cannot, after all, afford. Say what you will, illusion or "*Maya*", this madness, though, is only increasing day by day. For every single person benefitted by this system, there are at least thousands who have been destroyed by it.

There is a saying that interest is dearer than the principal. We see this clearly in the case of the grandchildren. When our children were growing up I spent very little time with them being preoccupied with work, club and other things. I did not know what they were studying or how they grew up and matured. Fate decreed that we bring up our grandchildren with us and after my retirement I have plenty of time on my hands. So now my world revolves round my grandchildren. I panic that they may be in trouble if I cannot find them for a moment.

When we talk of principal and interest, we are reminded of the "*Kabuliwallah*", the man from Kabul. From that far of place he comes to our country to carry on with his traditional money lending business even though he is a total stranger to the area where he sets out to do business. He is sure to be there, at your door step or at the office gate, at the end of every month to collect his interest. If anyone tries to escape repayment, he is prepared even for a murder. This is one Shylock type image of a *Kabuliwallah*. There is another tender and humane image of him in the famous tale of "*Kabuliwallah*" of the great poet, Tagore.

Islam does not approve of charging of interest. But if this interest is not there, imagine what a change it would have meant to the economic situation in the world! Is it not wisely said by the poet of the famous "*Sumati Satakam*" that where there is none to lend, that place is no good for a living? If there is no question of interest, which patron will be willing to give a loan? Then where will those people, "*Appu chesi pappukudu*" types, who live in style on borrowings only, survive?



**ADHRUSHTAM**  
**(FATE OR FORTUNE)**

My brother has become accustomed to a very easy life with a secure and comfortable position for the last thirty years in an American university. There is no world for him other than the books and his students. He would take a three week vacation once in five years or so to visit India to meet his parents, friends and relations. As he cannot withstand our hot weather he would venture to visit only during the winter. He does not set out unless he had made all the reservations for all the journeys including the internal travel in India, well before the due departure date from his place. Because it is a nuisance with baggage he travels with only one small suitcase. Yet it is his fate or misfortune that invariably his travels entail inconveniences and irritants. The flight from his country itself might get delayed. If he crosses that hurdle, there can be some mechanical problem enroute and as a result inconvenience. Otherwise, as soon as he lands in our country, there will be a "*Bandh*"; we have these work stoppages every other day called the *bandhs* on some pretext or other. As a result, he may have difficulty to reach the house from the airport. Far worse is his plight when he is caught up in a bandh while on a train journey. It is quite common for him to reach his

destination, thanking his stars that he is still all in one piece despite the starvation and struggle with the train stopping at some unearthly place for a day till the *bundh* is over. It is really strange that all calamities in our country seem to happen only when my brother lands here.

There are some really lucky people. Whatever they touch turns into gold. Anyone who dares to oppose and obstruct them gets annihilated and eats dust. As an example I can cite my eldest brother. He was a diligent student. It is not a big deal for a diligent and a studious person to score good marks and for everyone praising him as a good lad. It must, however, be said that it was my brother's good fortune or luck to stand first in every examination and every course he took in life. It was quite common for my brother to secure something for which he did not make any effort or one he would never have dreamt in his wildest dreams. Of the many such instances let me tell one as an example. Once in his office, by pulling some political strings his colleague got a letter advising him of the government's intention to depute him to a foreign country, which would enable him to earn a lot. The big boss in the office was not aware of it until the letter was received in his office and he was furious. Immediately he started his crusade to get the deputation decision to be changed in favour of my brother, who in his opinion was the fittest person to be sent in lieu. Soon there was a political change and the big-wig, who was instrumental for the earlier deputation decision, was out of the scene and the recommendation of the boss was accepted and a couple of days later my brother was off on his deputation to the foreign country.

There are yet others who achieve whatever they want but only after every conceivable difficulty is overcome with Herculean efforts and they get dog-tired. I can recall my uncle as one with such luck. Like the proverbial "*Pichika Meeda Brahmastram*", literally a polaris missile on a pigeon, he would approach big guns even for getting a small job done. The moment he used to come home and declare with confidence, "I have done it. This is my best chance", the very next day it would appear that tables had turned on him and he had to renew his efforts to set the track straight for his dream train to run true to its course. Once he was told that the government was sending him on deputation to USA to prosecute postgraduate studies and a sum was also sanctioned for him to get some warm suits and other clothing necessary for his stay in that country. He was told that he was to get ready to leave in the following month. We received the news that the project under which he was to go was abandoned, no one knows why, the very next day he got his suits from the tailor. He was again set to go abroad for higher studies, but six years later to Newzealand instead of USA. After the affectionate farewells in the office and the send-offs at the Bapatla railway station with garlands and all, he boarded the train to go to Calcutta from where he was to catch the flight to Newzealand. On the way at Visakhapatnam he got the message to return and join duty at Bapatla. It was another month later that he did finally leave for Newzealand.

It is indeed very difficult to say whether a particular event is really a fortunate happening. Suppose a person won millions in a lottery. Everyone would say that it was a good fortune of that person. Suppose that person died of heart attack on hearing the

news of his lottery win. What should we say of his win in lottery? In general a gain of someone means a loss to somebody else. For every one winner in a lottery there are millions who have lost. It is, however, not correct to infer that every good fortune has to be at the expense of a misfortune of several others. If one fortunate person enjoys good health can we say that it is because several others have to suffer poor or indifferent health for it? Similarly if one is blessed by Goddess "*Saraswaty*", his writings amuse and instruct all but never harm others.

In life everyone has to contend with some misfortunes and some blessings, though their proportions vary from one to another. Some have more misfortunes than blessings while some others have more blessings. The former are called the unfortunates and the latter the fortunates. The learned, however, tell us that a bliss of permanent happiness or salvation is realised only when one, reposing implicit faith in God, can take both the good and the misfortunes with equanimity, going through life unperturbed, like the undisturbed drop of water on a lotus leaf in the swirling waters of a stream. It is true that it is very difficult to live according to this precept. Only very few great men can lead such lives. For the good of the world it is, however, enough if people are not jealous of the good fortunes of others.

## ***PETHTHANAM***

### ***(BOSSISM)***

Then I was newly married and I was amused when I saw the interesting wall plaque in my sister-in-law's house with an inscription, "I am the boss in my house and I have my wife's permission to say so". I took it only as a joke. I was a fresher in the office also and I had at that time really no idea of what a boss or bossism meant. That experience came later.

In our country all the bosses think that unless their subordinates address them with a "Sir" before every sentence, the subordinates do not have any regard or respect for them. If the boss says, sit, the hapless subordinate has to sit and if he says, stand, he has to stand. I did not know this truth and when I sat opposite to him in his chamber, my boss, the Deputy Chief Engineer chastised me with a remark that he did not think he had asked me to sit down. I felt awkward and did not know what to do or to say then. Similarly anyone, who has done his Ph.D or D.Sc., feels slighted if he is not addressed as Doctor so and so. You are mistaken if we think that this trait was handed down to us by our colonial rulers because it was the practice in their countries. When I was sent by the government to England for one year to do a postgraduate course in the

London University, I was indeed surprised to see at first hand those people in their country. It is very common to observe in that country, for a big boss being addressed by his first name by his subordinates and the subordinate does not even get up from his seat when the boss lands at his work place, however lowly placed the subordinate might be. This sets me to think whether they invented this sham show of respect of saying Sir and standing up business just to put us down. Those fortunate few who were sent abroad in those colonial days, either for higher studies or for training by their employers, were extremely pleased to see the equality, fraternity and respect for fellow human beings shown among the inhabitants there. They were proud that they could raise their heads and behave as equals to those native people. The same people of England who treated them with respect and consideration, when they arrived in India used to treat them and behave as if to remind them, that they were after all slaves. On the trip home, the behaviour of the Britishers changed dramatically the moment they crossed Eden. That is why I think Kipling said, "East is east, west is west and never the twain shall meet."

Be that as it may, even though the British Lords have left ,after our independence the slave mentality they left in us continues to influence us still. Similarly the feudalism ,that earlier reigned supreme for several centuries in our country, has made not only the ordinary common folk but also those who consider themselves educated and enlightened among us, behave as servants of the people's representatives or the Ministers, even after all these years after our independence. More over we are electing as our leaders only the descendants of

our erstwhile rulers, whether they have the capacity to lead or not.

Another strange phenomenon of common daily occurrence we see in our country is the attitude of the boss, who dominates and rides rough over his subordinates not only during the time they work in the office but also for every wakeful moment of their lives. For those unfortunate folks who are provided accommodation in the colonies, like the railwaymen or the armed services personnel, this bossism hovers around them in person from morning to the evening bed time. Except for a peon or a sepoy there is always a boss and a subordinate for everyone else. In these colonies, even when people meet for recreation in a club or in someone's house for a social get-together, this boss syndrome is very much in sight. This is even more significantly apparent in the wives. It is common to observe the wife of a major behaving as if she is a colonel and likewise the wife of a chief engineer behaving as a general manager in their intercourse with fellow ladies.

There are some extraordinary people who can have their bosses totally dependent on them and have them literally eat out of their hands. It is child's play for them to have their bosses totally under their control. When I talk of such people my uncle comes uppermost to my mind. Every colleague of my uncle was jealous of his prowess with the boss and his seniors in particular would vow to take a good care of him when their turn would come to be his boss. But the same senior, in a few days of his becoming my uncle's boss, would become a toy in the hands of my uncle. It is because he would complete any task given to him, be it personal or official, much before the due time. It was

jokingly said that if his boss wanted a lock from the President's hair, he would get it by imploring the President," My boss reveres you and would like to keep a lock of your hair for daily worship along with other idols and holy relics in his possession."

It is said that one should not stand in front of a boss and like wise should never stand behind a horse. If you stand in sight of the boss he would find some work, whether really necessary or not. A person is benefitted, though, by being not too far away but sufficiently nearby to present himself for any emergency requirement of the boss. Call it a wonder or an illusion! Just like the mother-in-law who forgets that she too was once a daughter-in-law and ill treats the daughter-in-law, the boss forgets that he too was a subordinate earlier and bosses over his subordinates with even more intensity than the bossism he suffered earlier. An equally strange phenomenon is the behaviour of the subordinates. If a boss treats him with consideration and as fellow human being he takes advantage and dances on the heads of his bosses and does not work even at the half the tempo at which he would have slogged for a boss who really bosses.

A boss in office and the wife at home are the same. The ladies of the earlier generation were initially very shy and obedient to their spouses and only later became their bosses. The ladies of the present generation who are educated and bread earners like their husbands are, however, behaving as bosses right from the first night of their nuptials. Just as only those people are getting along in the office by never opposing their bosses and praising them now and then as the most intelligent and efficient, only those who follow similar tactics at home also are enjoying peace and comfort and



stealthily getting whatever they want. Those imbeciles who do not know this secret are suffering both at home and at work.

## ***PADDHATI, PHALITHAM***

### ***(MEANS AND ENDS)***

All of us remember well, our elders dinning into our heads that method is important and the way our teacher made us overwrite the alphabets with our fingers in the sand and pressing our hands while tracing, till we screamed to say that we understood him. Later when we were learning mathematics, the teacher insisted that we show that we understood the method or the procedure in doing a sum by writing down neatly all the steps with the rough calculations clearly written down in the big margin on the right hand side of the working sheet. For a confused kid like me, until I matured to understand all the nuances, this adherence to the instructions as regards the steps always did some good because I could never get the right answer; I managed to secure a pass mark because my working indicated that I was on the right track for at least a part of the way through the sum. That method was given a prime position in our society even from ancient *vedic* times, is evident in the way the *vedas* are taught even to this day. There is no stress on knowing the meaning of what they are to chant and all is well so long as the way they chant is right. In the study of sciences also the stress on the importance of doing the practicals to the procedure stipulated and the fact that a scientific

invention is recognised and accepted by the world only when the same results are obtained by anyone else following the same procedure, instil great respect in us for following the right method in any endeavour.

Perhaps the dictum that "this is our custom or method" promoted by the different groups of humans has enriched the culture of their societies. We can recognise the importance of the method not only in mundane day to day affairs but even in the metaphysical and ethical issues. Our elders teach us that we cannot seek to right a wrong through wrong methods or means and that we cannot justify wrong means for a right end. That this principle is applicable to politics also was demonstrated to the whole world by our Mahatma Gandhi.

Can we then say with confidence that by giving importance to the method and following it without any deviation, we will reach our end of a right result? Can we at least say that if our means are good the results will not be bad? Don't you agree that it is a good thing to feed anyone with milk? If a snake is raised as a pet and fed with milk, does it ensure that it will not bite you? Can we say that our good method has produced a good result in this case? It means that if we want a good result or end, our method or means must no doubt be right but of the different right methods or means we must adopt that one which would give us the end we are seeking.

If one were to proceed without knowing the end or not caring about it just because he is following the right method, can you imagine its result? Suppose we boarded a train going in the proper direction but we are ignorant of our destination. The train keeps stopping here and there enroute and people will be getting in and

getting out. We remain seated because we do not know or do not have a destination. At last every one in the train gets off, the train reaching its terminal. We have reached some place no doubt but it may not be the one we should have. If travel alone was what we wanted we have achieved our end or aim. Are you asking, "what this rambling is all about?" Then what do you think the civil servants are doing when they care only for the rules and not for the public good the rules are supposed to protect? What are the judges doing when their judgements are solely on the letter of the law and not the spirit of the law and they are not taking into account the humane consideration of the issues involved? Do you think that their deeds are any better than the narration in our rambling?

The wise sayings of our elders and the examples set by the exemplary deeds in life of the great men do remind us and ensure that the importance of the means is not lost sight of by us. For example, consider the sayings and deeds of Abraham Lincoln. He had so succinctly described what a democracy means. He did not say that it is the rule of the representatives elected by the people on their own free will. He said that it is the government of the people, for the people and by the people. He was a great man, who recognised slavery as a blot to humanity and human dignity and for its elimination he did not hesitate to fight his own brethren who wanted its perpetration, just like the great Arjuna who took out his bow on the battle field of Kurukshetra to fight for *dharma*. That is the precise reason for his special place not only in the history of the USA but in the history of the whole world. The great and divine persons Jesus Christ and Gautam Buddha preached, practiced and proved that the true end or aim of one

born as a human being is to lead a life full of compassion and love.

## ***VADDANTE PELLI*** ***(MARRAGE BY FORCE)***

If anyone asks an old man, "Hey, grandpa, do you want to marry?", it is said that he would not say what use is marriage at his age but that he would only ask, "Who is there prepared to marry me?" It means that every male, however old he might be, is always willing to marry. What do you think the answer will be, if the same question is posed to an old woman? We do not know, because no one in this male dominated world ever seemed to have asked her for her opinion. Should we suppose that everyone wants to marry? Then from where does this expression of "*Vaddante Pelli*" (marriage by force) has come into our Telugu usage?

I think that the habit of forcing someone to do something, albeit out of love and affection or concern, he does not want, had been prevailing in our society from the very beginning. We had seen the hospitality shown to a guest in our childhood, when the host kept on forcing the guest with more and more helpings despite the pleadings of the hapless guest that he could take no more until he was prepared to leave his plate and run for his life. Lately this type of coercion has vanished thanks to the fact that economic conditions

have changed and it is becoming difficult for a great majority to have even two square meals a day. However, these days, a number of new types of coercions have surfaced.

Suppose somebody has gained fame in some field by his hard work and dedication to it. What do we see then? Our people shower all felicitations, titles and encomiums on him only. All the universities vie with each other to confer honorary degrees on him only. People put pressure on him to accept the role of presiding over every conceivable type of meeting despite the unfortunate fellow's pleadings that he has no expertise in the subject proposed to be discussed in any such meetings. They ask him to judge and declare the winners in all competitions be it, music, drama, dance, painting or even a beauty contest. If we accept that it is only the fault of those who are after him to perform such a duty, what should we say of that expert, who accepts all such invitations even though he is incompetent in the fields he is asked to preside over or evaluate and decide?

A common but weird phenomenon we observe in the official circles is that if one gentleman is a big-wig in the office, his wife is no less either. In an unofficial social organisation, say, the "*Mahila Sangh*" organised for the welfare of the families of the people working in the organisation headed by the big-wig, they put pressure on the wife of the big-wig to head that *mahila sangh*. If one innocent lady confesses to the fact that she does not have the capacity to manage her own household tangles and wants to be excused to take up the presidentship of the *mahila sangh*, the rest of the ladies would hear none of it. Can anyone, even if she is reputed to be a capable and efficient lady, stand for a

contest for presidentship against a known incompetent or nitwit first lady of the organisation? Does anyone have the guts to put up such a candidate either? Should we sympathise with the unfortunate first lady who is forced into it despite her genuine concerns and protests? Should we be disgusted with that lady who insists on being the figure head simply because she happens to be the first lady?

In the official affairs we see another farce. If one is the head of an organisation, everyone invites him only for all conferences. Everyone is enamoured of a visit to the foreign countries. For all such opportunities, our head may be thrusting himself to go or the concerned authorities would be sponsoring his name only. He gets nominated to be a member of every committee. Rare indeed is for anyone to decline such an offer because he is already burdened with many other committees and he is unable to do justice to any or all of them. What should we call such a fellow, who says yes for everything like a "*Do, Do Basavanna*" (as the wise bull named Basavanna, is supposed to indicate yes or no to every command with a shaking of his head to the chanting of this catch word, by its master, the street performer familiar in our Andhra).

We are witnessing this "*Vaddante Pelli*" syndrome in politics also. He is the Prime Minister and he is also the party president. If a member of legislative assembly of the state government (MLA) or a member of the parliament at the center (MP) dies they are putting up his spouse for filling that vacancy whether she has the requisite inclination, capacity and credentials or not. The people also are electing them.

The learned have told us that even in charity there is a proper and an improper one. We should



likewise exercise propriety in the conferring of titles, assignments and honours. Only then we will do real good and march ahead in this world.

## ***COMPLEXION, BEAUTY, AND CHARACTER***

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever", says a poet. Another poet says, "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder." It is true that in the first meeting of the eyes itself we experience an undescrivable feeling of either attraction or repulsion. If one were to inquire for the reason for such a feeling there can be no logical explanation. There are only one in a million who are attractive and considered beautiful in the eyes of everyone. If that beauty happens to be a lady, history tells us that to claim her, terrible wars were fought and many have perished in them. If that object of universal adoration was a male, we have only heard that every lady had enjoyed his patronage. We never hear that the ladies fought any wars for him. Since it had always been a male dominated world, to get what he wanted he could sacrifice any number of innocent lives or people. A woman, however, had to live by her wits and she could get what she wanted only through stealth and under cover.

What is beauty? perhaps we have to say it is figure and looks or appearance. Even though looks are known to be deceptive, the first victory must be conceded to appearance. Ask a lover as to why he is loving somebody. The answer is likely to be that he

likes such and such in her looks or appearance. Take the "*PELLI CHOOPULU*" (marriage viewings). Even though the issues of dowry or gifts are brought up later, the affair moves to those issues only after the boy and the girl declare that they seem to like each other. On what basis is that statement of liking made? Is it not, only on the appearance?

Poets described a beauty, as one with a face that mocks the moon, or one that has a slender midriff of a lion, or as a lady with lotus like round and big eyes etc., If a painter should attempt to sketch a beauty literally the way the bard described, it would come out as an ill-proportioned ugly person. How come?

Even though there is no connection between complexion and beauty, if a person is of fair complexion, despite her many ugly features, a majority of our people would call her a beauty. Look at the matrimonial column! When a girl is described, do we not observe the stress on her fair complexion? We know a couple who have two daughters, one fair and the other dark. The dark complexioned girl is a beauty with fine chiselled features but the parents did not seem to notice her at all. For everything they would decry the dark one and ask her to accept inferior variety of things while their fair complexioned girl could ask for the moon and they would go all overboard to satisfy her every whim. This craze for fair complexion is evident not only in our Andhra but also in every part of our country.

In Calcutta the son of our Bengalee neighbour was of a very fair complexion. When he married his classmate from Kerala, his parents were upset not because he married a girl outside their State but because the bride was of dark complexion. To prove that this madness is not only in our country but is wide spread

throughout the world, we can mention the examples of the apartheid in South Africa, the Negro derision and the hate sects like the Ku Klux in the USA and so on.

Just as complexion and beauty are misjudged or wrongly tagged together, it is common to see character also incorrectly linked with colour or complexion. Even though it is well known that not everything black or dark is water and everything white or fair coloured is not milk, it is a common experience to observe the two, complexion and character, being wrongly linked. Everyone is impressed of our Shyaam, the younger grandson and they think he is an innocent fellow because of his fair complexion. Because our elder grandson Mahesh is dark complexioned very few notice him, and if they do, they are apt to think of him as a mischievous boy. When the boys play and a mischief is spotted, usually they suspect the elder Mahesh as the culprit.

We are familiar with the way the hero is described or portrayed as fair and the villain as dark in our movies and stories. An exception to this principle is the description of our epic heros Rama and Krishna. While describing them as the most handsome of all, it was not said that they were fair complexioned. They were supposed to be dark or sky-blue complexioned. Just as we forget many of the good things read or heard in the "*Puranas*", (the epic tales of God coming down to earth from time to time in one form or other, for protection of righteous and destruction of evil) hearing them from one side of the ear and letting them out from the other ear, we forget this description of the complexion contrary to actual association in the real world.

This linkage of a fair skin to a beauty or a desirable quality, is not only seen in respect of human beings but also in our perception of other material things as well. I still remember that incident when I was twelve years of age. The wife of our teacher asked me to buy "*Vankayalu*", the vegetables called in English as egg-plants or brinjals. When I told her that I never bought vegetables and I did not know how to pick and choose the good ones, she scolded me that I was lying just to avoid the chore and I had to go to the *bazaar* that day. I selected all those shining and white and quickly returned from their house after depositing the basket. I could not help enquiring the next day as to how good my selection turned out. Our teacher pointed out the scrap heap with a twinkle in his eye and I noticed that they were all thrown away as useless. She looked at me sympathetically to imply how such an idiot would grow up and manage a household as an adult and did not scold me at all for my foolishness.

Don't you agree that this misconception coming down from generations and so deeply ingrained in our genes is exercising its influence in every sphere of our life?

## ***DOWRY***

The learned say that God had created man in his own mould and closest to Him and that human beings are the pinnacle of all God's creations and that He left in them a little blemish of "*Maya*" or illusion so that they could not compete with Him. It is also a common belief that human society is progressing, improving its civilization over the different generations. Without contradicting that belief by quoting the instance of dowry, let us start our discussion with what they are saying is the truth indeed.

It is true that mankind had progressed from the stage of hunting and consuming raw flesh and bones for their sustenance, to the present modern civilization developing the various fine arts and enriching their cultural heritage. God had created the male and the female with a difference; the male stronger and the female as the weaker of the two. That great God, enjoying the game of creation had put in beauty, sex and conception in His species and left it to them to play and procreate. Whoever has invented this concept of marriage must be recognised as one who had made the greatest contribution to civilization ignoring what Bernard Shaw had derisively commented about marriage as a public confession of a strictly private intention. It would appear that this institution of

marriage must have been devised by a male who was physically weak but intelligent to have for himself the beauty of his choice or by a lady who wanted to avoid being claimed by a strong fellow whom she did not want to have as a mate. Irrespective of the fact who invented it, it must be accepted that this institution of marriage has demolished the tyranny of physical prowess and established ground rules for a socialistic way of life.

Even in the western Christian civilized world which looks down on us as uncultured, the biggest ritual in a marriage is the strange business of giving away the bride by her father. What our guru or "*Brahma*" and their priest ask the couple to chant and repeat are the same marriage vows. While our guru makes us chant the vows in Sanskrit, a language most of us do not understand, their priest makes them promise in the language they speak and understand. There is no difference in the content of the promises to be made.

When we think of a marriage the two terms that are uppermost in our minds are the "*Varakatnam*", the dowry and "*Kanyasulkam*", the bride price. Thanks to the great *Gurajada*, the word *Kanyasulkam* had become disgusting and eventually its practice vanished dashing all the hopes of the foolish orthodox old men wanting to buy young girls of eight as brides. In its place dowry or *varakatnam* has raised its ugly head.

The cash and the gifts of friends and relations, given voluntarily and out of love and affection, "*Katnam*" and "*Kanukalu*" respectively, came to be accepted as an innocent and pleasant custom. Subsequently the "*katnamulu*" like the "*Mangala Harati Katnam*" and "*Mangali Katnam*" became

compulsory because it is a custom and all customary payments are now known as "*Katnamulu*".

Because a king protects his people with his army, for the upkeep of the army and the king's family, the people were required to pay a "*Sulkam*", tax. So "*Sulkam*" was a payment made as a duty. Subsequently payment for a purchase also became a "*Sulkam*". Earlier in our country (and even these days in many so-called under developed countries in African continent), there was no "*Varakatnam*", the dowry or "Groom Money". This dowry has landed amidst us to tell us that everything in our progress is not necessarily one that we can be proud of.

Economics has given us a principle of supply and demand. It says that a good relationship exists between the two; when the demand exceeds the supply, the price for the supply increases and conversely the price reduces if the supply is in excess of the demand. Even though the population of the females is on par with the males, this dowry is ever increasing in our society contrary to the economic rule of supply and demand. Some say that this cannot be rectified so long as the world continues to be male dominated because it is the prime reason for such a practice as the dowry to exist. I would, however, say that it is not so and I cannot agree more with whoever has said that there is no greater enemy to a female than another female.

To some extent one can understand the demand of a dowry of a father for his son's marriage because he had to borrow to pay dowry for his daughter's marriage. When we hear, demands of this dowry even in families where there were no girls to marry off, tales of torture of daughters-in-law for bringing less dowry than their expectations and to our shame the new terms "Bride



Killings" and "Bride suicides" which are all mostly the doings of the mothers-in-laws, what else can we say?

Initially the bride money or dowry may have sprung up because of the male dominated world and such dictates handed down as the "*Manu Smriti*" that from birth to death the lot of a female is under the protection of a male, a father, husband or the son. But the fact, that even in this so-called educated and enlightened age also, dowry is thriving and we are witnessing atrocities against females, points an accusing finger at the ladies themselves. Don't you agree that until the ladies recognise this and come forward to bring about a revolution, this dowry evil is not going to end?

## ***EXPERIENCE***

*Manchi Neeru Poya MalliPuchunugani*

*Phalita Monaru Tetlu Panin Joramini*

*Vanta Cheya Ketlu Vantaka Mabbumu*

*Viswa Dabhirama Vinura Vema!*

*VemanaYogi*

If you want to be a cook you must not only learn the recipe but must practice it to get it right. Similarly if you want to grow a jasmine flower plant and enjoy its fragrance, you have to nurture the plant, by daily watering, putting manure and spraying pesticides and other medicines to keep it healthy. One may study the technical details and the procedure to do a thing but until he actually does it, he would never understand those fine points that need to be taken care of to make a thing the way it is supposed to be. That is why it is said that there is no substitute for practice or experience.

Granted that one needs experience, it is difficult to answer a question as to how much experience is necessary. For this one must know what

skill he is seeking. Take the example of cooking rice. First you must know the degree of cooking you want. Do you want it over cooked or under cooked? How do you define the over or under cooking? If you cannot define it precisely, can you at least say whether a cooking was under or over done by tasting it after the event? If you cannot, how will you get the experience in rice cooking?

Let us suppose we know the standard to be attained. Both you and I have started our practice to achieve it. You may get it after practicing it for a couple of times while it may be beyond me even after I was at it for more than a dozen times. Why is that? There can be any number of reasons for a person to learn a thing at a very slow pace. He may be impatient and stop listening to the instruction saying, "I got it, I got it" and carry on with half knowledge. He may not be following the prescribed procedure exactly as it was told. Yet another reason could be a change in the environment or in the tools available and his inability to recognise the difference in practice to the theory taught. It could also be his losing interest in the task and performing it as a chore without any interest in it. If the reason is none of these I mentioned, we must accept that he lacks some unidentified ingredient in it and it is beyond him.

For example let us take the juggler, acrobat or any other performer in a circus. We need practice or experience to climb, roll or fly high into the air like him. It is also necessary that the practice must start when one is very young and supple or else the bones and muscles will not let one try it even once without some serious harm or injury. Even if we start at the right age we may not get that expertise at all despite all our efforts. What does that mean? There is no use trying

to master anything and everything. So we should not venture into anything unless our inclination and interests are in it. Otherwise, however hard we might be at it, success may elude us and our effort will make us only dejected.

Experience is necessary but how much experience should we have? Perhaps it will be correct to say that knowing the standards, our experience should be such that we are able to meet or comply with them. However, it is not always possible to postulate the standards. This task may require some time. In some others even with all the time it may be difficult to arrive at the standards. It may be that the subjectivity of the one who sets out to set the standards may lead him to go astray. We see this usually in the advertisements for jobs.

It is common to advertise vacancies and inviting applications stipulating certain years of experience in a particular type of work for the applicants. How they determine this limit is a riddle only those who advertise may know. In the present times of large scale unemployment, where it is common to receive thousands of applications for a single job, some arbitrary limit may help in reducing the number of applicants to a reasonable number to be handled. But other than that it must be recognised that the question is one which needs to be reflected at length. Can one honestly say that my experience of, say, three years in a given type of work is more than, say, two years of your work in a similar type or even identical work? In this discussion, my classmate comes to my mind. One day he came to me and declared, "The answer to this problem as given in the book is wrong. I struggled and did it so many times to check it. All our books are like

that. They are all trash. In a foreign book we cannot find even a single error. Even if by some mischance we find one, the moment we write to the author, he would gratefully acknowledge and recompense us for the trouble we took." I verified his statement by doing the sum and found that the answer given in the book was after all right and my good friend, though he did it a number of times, was committing the same mistake each and every time. What should we say to his experience of doing the sum so many times?

After a great deal of thought and examination of the issue in depth, what I discovered is that it is essential in evaluation of anyone's experience to find out whether in his experience he has seen only the good and rosy side or whether he has seen any set-backs and as a result understood the depths of the issues involved in his work. If one's life was all a bed of roses, what can we say of the experience of such a life? We have to admit that it is a zero.

## **GLOSSARY**

<i>Addata, Bestulu</i>	Game of Cards
<i>Aksharabhyasam</i>	Learning the Alphabets
<i>Alavatulo Porapatu</i>	Habitual Mistakes
<i>Appadalu, Odiyalu</i>	Andhra Savouries
<i>Appu Chesi Pappu Koodu</i>	Living on Loans
<i>Ariselu, Muggundalu,</i> <i>Obbatlu</i>	Andhra Condiments
<i>Aseelu</i>	Entry Tax
<i>Babu</i>	Paternal Uncle
<i>Bentu</i>	Smoking in Andhra rural style
<i>Betala</i>	Ghost in the Tales of Vikramaditya
<i>Bhajans</i>	Devotional Songs
<i>Bhakti</i>	Devotion
<i>Bhaktulu</i>	Devotees
<i>Burra Katha</i>	Andhra Folk Tales
<i>Chakkarakelis</i>	Type of Banana

<i>Chaldivannam</i>	Fermented Rice Dish
<i>Darshan</i>	Audience
<i>Dasserah, Deepavali, Ganesh Puja</i>	Indian Festivals
<i>Desh Ki Akhandata Aur Ikyeta</i>	Country's intergity and unity
<i>Devanagari</i>	Sanskrit Script
<i>Dhotis</i>	Indian male garment
<i>Garelu, Boorelu, Jantigalu, Pillari kayalu</i>	Indian snacks
<i>Garu</i>	Respectful address like 'Sir'
<i>Ghee</i>	Clarified Butter
<i>Gotram</i>	Lineage traced from Progenitors
<i>Gurajada</i>	Gurajada Apparao, Telugu literateur
<i>Haridasu</i>	Servant of God
<i>Harikatha</i>	Religious Tales
<i>Hindustani</i>	Common north Indian language
<i>Iyer, Iyyengar</i>	South Indian Brahmins
<i>Jamikayalu</i>	Guavas
<i>Japanee Saruku</i>	Japanese goods
<i>Jutka</i>	One horse vehicle
<i>Kanduah</i>	Male upper garment

<i>Kanlu</i>	Pice
<i>Kanukalu, Katnam, Katnalu</i>	Gifts, presents
<i>Kanyashulkam</i>	Bride Price
<i>Karanam, Munasab</i>	Village revenue officials
<i>Kasimajileelu</i>	Tales of pilgrims to Kasi(Banaras)
<i>Kothi Gunde Kaya</i>	Monkey's heart
<i>Kovabillalu</i>	Milk based sweet
<i>Laddey Veyave Gurrama</i>	Shit, Oh horse !
<i>Lathi</i>	Club
<i>Mala</i>	Untouchable
<i>Malapilla</i>	Untouchable girl
<i>Mamayya</i>	Maternal Uncle
<i>Mamoolu</i>	Tip, bribe
<i>Mangala Harati Katnam</i>	Gift at Arati
<i>Mangali Katnam</i>	Barber's tip
<i>Mantra</i>	Spell
<i>Mokkubadi</i>	Fulfillment of Vow
<i>Muggulu</i>	Decorative floor designs
<i>Mughalai Darbar</i>	Moghul Court
<i>Namalu</i>	Religious Marks
<i>Panakamlo Pudaka</i>	Undesirable presence



<i>Parasthanam</i>	Other locations
<i>Parothas, Puris</i>	Types of bread
<i>Patikapanchadara</i>	Sugar candy
<i>Pedda Pandugulu</i>	Big festivals
<i>Pelli Choopulu</i>	Marriage viewings
<i>Podupu Kathalu</i>	Riddles
<i>Prachara Sabhas</i>	Propagation Committees
<i>Prasad</i>	Offering blessed by God
<i>Puja Pandals</i>	Festive enclosure
<i>Pujari</i>	Priest
<i>Sankramana Pandugulu</i>	Pongal Festival
<i>Sayabu</i>	Common name for Muslim in Andhra
<i>Sree Ranga Neetulu</i>	Precepts inapplicable to oneself
<i>Srirama Navami</i>	Spring Festival
<i>Sudh Hindi</i>	Sanskritised Hindi
<i>Sudra</i>	Low Caste
<i>Taluka</i>	Sub-division
<i>Tamasha</i>	Entertainment
<i>Thaddinam, Taddinalu</i>	Death Anniverary(ies)
<i>Thandana Thana</i>	Drum beating by side kick

<i>Thatikayalu</i>	Toddy nuts
<i>Thithi</i>	Date in Indian Calender
<i>Uthapadam</i>	Mannerism, Refrain
<i>Vankayee, Vankayilu</i>	Brinjal(s)
<i>Varakatnam</i>	Dowry
<i>Varjyam</i>	Inauspicious time
<i>Vedas</i>	Hindu Religous texts
<i>Vibhuti</i>	Ashes
<i>Vikramarka</i>	King Virkamaditya
<i>Yadav</i>	Hindu caste
<i>Zarda Killi</i>	Beetal leaf with tobacco
<i>Zilla Parishad</i>	District Council